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Lilith

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COVER: Detail from "Mother and Child in Holland Park," by Dora Holzhandler (b. 1928). Holzhandler, a native of Paris, lives in London. Her work is described as transfiguring "the seemingly drab and mundane into a radiant reality." Reproduced by permission. RONA Gallery, London; Bridgeman Art Library, London, New York.

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from the editor

This season we mourn the passing of Bella Abzug (1920-1998), Congresswoman, candidate for U.S. Senate and Mayor of New York City, creator of WEDO, an organization devoted to putting women on the world-wide political agenda (see p. 46). But Bella played a special role for Jewish women that wasn't mentioned in the standard obits. Each time her views appeared in LILITH, her refreshing astringency and reassuring power affirmed Jewish women's rightful place in every decision-making process. In particular, I recall her telling a group of women convened to talk about peace in the Middle East that "We women, from both sides, should sit around a conference table and get the peace process going. Then we can get up and let men occupy our seats at the table, after we have modeled for them what a dialogue really is." And she meant it.

Her courage in giving voice to her ideas made her an enduring role model. A few months ago, when LILITH announced a feature on Jewish women who defy the conventions of politesse in order to be heard, we put out a call to our readers to tell us about women they admired as "Big Mouths"—the working title of the article. It came as no surprise that Bella Abzug was the name most frequently mentioned; Bella defined the genre. All we had to do when explaining the forthcoming article was to say, "You know, like Bella Abzug." And everyone got it.

Remembering Bella, I thought about a visit I paid recently to my great-grandparents' graves on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. When I noticed a marble column lying on its side over a grave, I complained to my guide that this was a desecration. "Oh no, he replied. "You miss the point. This is how this gravestone is supposed to be. The message is: A pillar of our community has fallen." The same must be said of Bella, may she rest in peace.

Usually I take this space to give you some background on the stories we're bringing you in the current issue. This time, I come to you with a plea for your participation in LILITH in a more active way than just as a reader.

Over the years, LILITH has made a difference in the way Jewish women perceive ourselves, and the way others see us. Articles on the dangers of the JAP stereotype. On Jewish hair, abortion rights, the "Eat, eat! Diet! Diet!" messages. On Jewish women's philanthropy—how women give money to change things for the better, while men often write checks to support the status quo.

LILITH has challenged the status quo again in reporting the allegations of sexual misconduct women are making about the late rabbi and musician Shlomo Carlebach (Spring 1998). As you'll see when you read a selection of the letters LILITH has received (p. 12), the LILITH article triggered some anger, but it also, more importantly, gave women permission to tell their own stories for the first time.

Women give money to change things for the better. Here's *your* chance.

Please help us continue to be able to speak the truth on crucial issues for Jewish women. "Important and courageous" articles like this (and these words come from our readers) are very costly to research, to report, to verify and to publish. LILITH is a not-for-profit enterprise. To publish, the magazine depends on tax-deductible contributions from readers like you. We need your generous support urgently—right now—if we are going to be able to continue the kind of investigative reporting that makes a difference in the lives of women and men.

Please send a check now to Lilith Publications Inc.—or put a contribution on your credit card (the mailing address and other contact information appear on the previous page). Thank you for helping to sustain LILITH in this critical time.

Susan Weidman Schneider

Lilith

In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple... The Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said, "We are equal because we are created from the same earth."
(from The Alphabet of Ben Sira, 23a-b)

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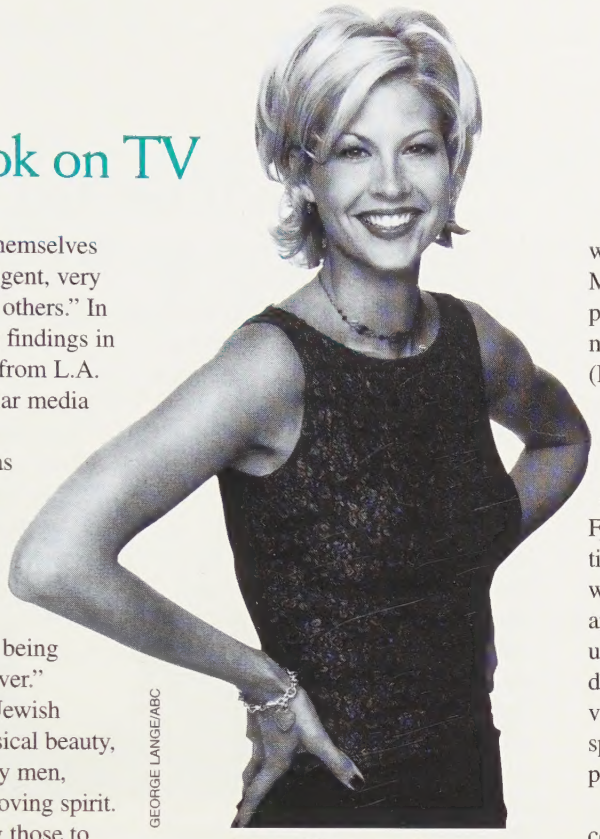
How We Look on TV

Jewish women perceive themselves as "well-educated, intelligent, very giving and supportive of others." In contrast, here are some other findings in a soon-to-be-released report from L.A. on how we're doing in popular media such as television and films:

- We do not see ourselves as "beautiful or even attractive," nor as "sensuous, playful or fun-loving."
- The high incidence of television intermarriages reinforces our feelings of being "insignificant or passed over."
- Jewish women envy non-Jewish counterparts for their physical beauty, their ability to attract many men, their athleticism and fun-loving spirit.

These findings are among those to be released this summer in a report of the Morning Star Commission, a group of high-profile producers, directors, agents, screenwriters, studio executives, authors, artists and two rabbis funded by Hadassah-Southern California to study the portrayal of Jewish women in film and television.

According to the study, which surveyed Southern California Jews and non-Jews, non-Jewish women saw the typical Jewish woman in a predominantly negative light, emphasizing prominent noses, Middle Eastern complexions and an inclination to be overweight. Jewish women described the portrayal of Jewish women on television as "pushy, controlling, selfish, unattractive, materialistic, high-maintenance, shallow, domineering. . . . They nag their husbands and spend all their time cooking or shopping," is the commission's summary. They also felt that Jewish women and men were depicted as cheap bargain-hunters.



GEORGE LANGE/ABC

Jenna Elfman as Dharma in "Dharma & Greg"

In film, only three positive images of Jewish women emerged: Amy Irving, the beautiful heroine in "Crossing Delancey"; Bette Midler, the caring friend in "Beaches"; and Barbra Streisand, the supportive therapist in "Prince of Tides." The only positive image of a Jewish woman on television, according to the Jewish men in the study, was Dharma of "Dharma & Greg"—because of her "non-Jewish appearance."

Jewish men felt that Jewish women were "devoted mothers and very responsible," but not particularly attractive. As one male participant said, "This is not to say that Jewish women are not beautiful because they are, but they're usually not the tall, glamorous model types."

"I was profoundly shaken when I saw the videotapes of the focus groups and actually heard and saw the disfigurement of who and what we [Jewish women] are," responded Joan Hyler, Morning Star Commission chair and president of Hyler Management, a management and production company. (Hyler was designated by E! Entertainment Television as one of Hollywood's most powerful women.)

With the first phase completed, commission founder and director Mara Fein hopes "to provide more information about authentic voices of Jewish women in order to ensure more varied and realistic depictions in film and popular culture." The commission plans to distribute recommendations, and to provide awards, incentives, resources and sponsors for those who create positive portrayals of Jewish women.

But the question remains, can the commission really affect change? "The commission members and those on our Media Advisory Council are extremely powerful people in Hollywood," notes Claudia Caplan, commission chair for research and the creative director at Mendelsohn-Zien Advertising. She's right about the powerful part. The advisory group includes Ed Asner, Academy Awards producer Gil Cates, Paramount president and chair Sherry Lansing, CBS president Leslie Moonves, producer Lili Fini Zanuck, and Showtime president Jerry Offsay.

"We can't expect change overnight, but we can expect more honesty and authenticity," says Caplan. "We don't want a distorted or beautiful mirror—just a real one."

—Sherrill Kushner

For more information about the Morning Star Commission, check its website at morningstaronline.org or hadassahsc.org or call (310) 659-5168.

Jewish Identity on the Small Screen

"There are a number of powerful women 'in the closet,' not only about being Jews but also about being members of Jewish organizations, like Hadassah," comments Joan Hyler. "We have struggled so hard to come to our jobs that a denial of who we are is no longer acceptable." Among the heavy hitters, many just out of the closet, who are sitting on the Morning Star Commission:

- Gail Berman, producer of the hit television series "Buffy the Vampire Slayer"
- Hope Boonshaft, senior vice president for External Affairs at Sony Entertainment
- Robin Green, senior vice president at Castle Rock TV
- Faye Kellerman, author
- Nina Jacobson, executive vice president of production, Walt Disney Pictures
- Arlene Sarner, screenwriter, "Peggy Sue Got Married"

Rooms for Refuge

Nearly 10 years ago, Naomi Berman-Potash was working in the sales department of a hotel when she read a newspaper article detailing how victims of domestic abuse were being turned away from full shelters. Her idea was to ask hotels to offer free rooms to these battered women.

"It was sort of a tough start," she remembers. The hoteliers, concerned about security, were reluctant to participate. Berman-Potash realized that the idea would be more palatable if she could present it through a formal organization. In 1990, Project Debbie was born.

The organization, which began in Houston, Texas, now includes agencies in New York City and in Tampa and West Palm Beach, Florida; there are plans for extensions into New Hampshire, Los Angeles, and Washington State. In each of these areas, Project Debbie collaborates with local non-profit agencies (for example, the Junior League of New York and Victim Services in New York), which,

as official project agencies, then screen and place women. Berman-Potash trains these organizations in how to approach hotels and keep the process going. Project Debbie is run completely by volunteers. Collaborators include any organizations that have the means to screen applicants, from women's shelters to law enforcement agencies.

Since security is the main concern of hotels, Project Debbie employs an intensive screening process before accepting a prospective participant. Someone being closely stalked, for example, may endanger hotel guests and will not be placed.

The organization does help many women who otherwise would wait for space in shelters or be turned away. For instance, in Houston, a mother and a son over 14 years old will not be placed in the same shelter. Project Debbie enables them to live together. It will also set up a itinerary of hotels for women who have fled their abusers and are now traveling, but do not have money for accommodations.

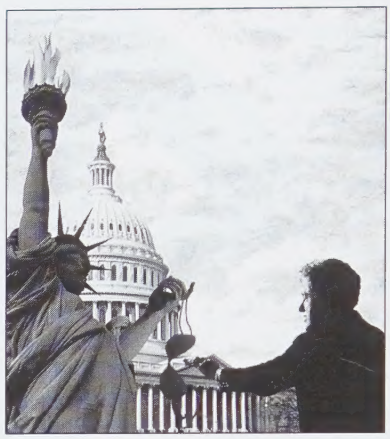
Since 1990, the organization has arranged an average of 1,000 room nights per year. "Most hotels have been really cooperative," said Berman-Potash. "It's amazing how many we have on board."

—Tamara Fishman

Anyone interested in volunteering to work on Project Debbie can contact Naomi Berman-Potash at (561) 585-8612. She has prepared training manuals and, if able, will conduct personal training sessions.

It's Not What You Think!

40,000 Bras Needed for a Tapestry to Be Presented to President Clinton.



Women are being asked to donate bras for the creation of a 40x100 foot tapestry of the Statue of Liberty that will be presented to President Bill Clinton in the fall to demonstrate the urgent need for more research into breast cancer prevention.

Spurred by anthropologists Soma Grismaijer and Sydney Singer, who wrote *Dressed to Kill: The Link Between Breast Cancer and Bras* (Avery Books, 1995), and as a natural development from his own artwork—notably "The Breast: Another American Icon"—conceptual artist Nicolino is coordinating the creation of a National Bra Tapestry.

The bras—mailed in by individuals and collected in bra drives and bra-a-thons as the project travels across America—will be woven into the tapestry. With a target date of September 22 for presenting the tapestry to the president, organizers hope that the public-participation aspect of the project, where each bra symbolizes votes and requests by American women, will persuade the president to earmark more funds for cancer prevention research.

Grismaijer and Singer have raised the question of a possible link between breast cancer and bras. The husband-and-wife team spent time in Fiji, where they found that the population wearing Western clothing had a remarkably higher rate of breast cancer than those who wear bra-less native dress. (This rate may be explained by factors unrelated to underwear.)

Why present the bras to President Clinton? (Why not Richard Klausner, head of the National Cancer Institute?) "We feel that the president is the most powerful person to make this happen. We feel that humor is a powerful communicator, and we would like to shamelessly exploit the politics around the president's relationships with women to rally the public around this cause," says Nicolino.

—Naomi Danis

Send your bras to: National Bra Tapestry, 4298 Vineland Ave., Studio City, CA 91602.; (818) 980-9733.

Rabbis Demand a "Public Outcry" on Agunot

"Chava," from Portland, Oregon, reports that her husband demanded $5 million dollars in exchange for a *get*. "Yetta" from Spring Valley, New York, says she was given her official document of Jewish divorce only after she relinquished an order of protection against her husband; he subsequently entered her home and "nearly murdered" her, she reports. When "Shaina" from Long Island, New York, went to two rabbis in order to secure her divorce, they made public the details of her marital life and led to her loss of custody of her children.

These cases of blackmail and other misconduct against *agunot*—"chained" women whose husbands refuse to grant them a Jewish divorce—are taken from the files of the Supreme Rabbinic Court of America, a group of Orthodox rabbis in New York City who have come together to use Jewish law to free these women. For the first time in decades, and in direct conflict with other Orthodox communities, these rabbis—of course all male—are reviving processes of annulment in order to free women from abusive marriages.

"Jewish law does not require that Jewish women remain the prisoners of such sadistic fiends," wrote the directors of Agunah Inc., an organization of women led by Susan Aranoff, Honey Rackman and Henni Goldstein that was organized to help women fight for divorce and that has been supporting the efforts of the court.

The stories that the court, or *beit din*, released this spring recount case after case in which women seeking divorce for reasons of psychological and physical abuse were denied a Jewish divorce by their husbands. The stories are brutal, recounting beatings, rape, threats of murder and more. A number come from women whose husbands are serving decades-long jail sentences and will not release them. Worse, they show husbands engaging in blackmail for money, children or sexual favors. Finally, these reports show rabbis collaborating in such schemes.

Rabbis of one divorce court, said "Deena," told her to relinquish all monetary demands against her husband—alimony, child support, etc.—and give up custody and visitation rights in exchange for the *get*. They "counseled me to think of myself as a Holocaust survivor who was fortunate to survive with my life and the *get*."

The *beit din* and some women are accusing other rabbis of cooperating with husbands in this blackmail purely for financial gain. "Let's face it," commented Rabbi Terbiyahu Gilner, a member of the court. "Since they're normally paid $300 an hour—and these cases can drag on for days, often for years—my colleagues have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. . . . To me, their motivation is obvious."

The court and its supporters have taken heat for their actions. They were rebuked by prominent Orthodox rabbis at this year's Feminism & Orthodoxy Conference in New York. Norma Baumel Joseph, a Canadian scholar and the Orthodox feminist activist who assisted in making Canada's national divorce statutes responsive to the needs of *agunot*, has written that she will not send her clients to the court for divorce because "a divorce that is not recognized, that will leave them in an adulterous bind, is not a solution."

The concern Joseph is addressing is a serious one for women who receive the court's annulment: if the annulment is not recognized widely, women who remarry may find themselves considered adulterers, and may find that their children by the subsequent marriage are considered illegitimate.

Nonetheless, Rabbi Moshe Antelman, chief justice of the court, suggests that the battle must now be waged in public. "We now realize that only education and public outcry can end this physical and emotional abuse of thousands of women every year."

—Sarah Blustain

Depressing News about Jewish Men

The Harvard Mental Health Letter reports that a community survey in Los Angeles and New Haven finds a high rate of mood disorders and a low rate of alcoholism among Jewish men. Jews, the letter reports, "had a higher rate of major depression than Catholics or Protestants" and "Jewish men were almost as likely to have a history of major depression as Jewish women, although the rate was twice as high in women among Protestants and Catholics."

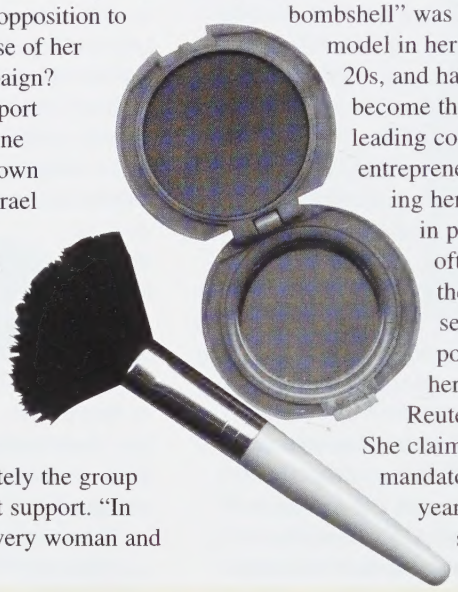
"The lifetime rate of alcohol abuse and dependence is 11% in Jewish men and 28% in Catholic and Protestant men—two and a half times as high."

The authors point out that men and women have also been found to be equally vulnerable to depression among the Amish of Pennsylvania, who drink no alcohol.

Makeup Magnate's Bid for Knesset Troubles Feminists

As Pnina Rosenblum, one of Israel's most talked about celebrities makes her bid for a seat in the Knesset, Israeli feminists have faced a conflict: should they endorse the cosmetics entrepreneur in female solidarity, or should they withhold their support in opposition to the former model's use of her sexuality in her campaign?

According to a report from Reuters by Janine Zacharia (LILITH's own former intern), the Israel Women's Network "only agreed to back Rosenblum after an extensive debate. Some members thought her use of her beauty to get elected was anti-feminist," but ultimately the group expressed its hesitant support. "In principle, we back every woman and so we'll back her. The fact is that whatever she says, she wants to promote women and whatever she does gets media attention," the IWN spokeswoman told Reuters.



A familiar figure in the press, the 43-year-old "brown-eyed blonde bombshell" was Israel's top model in her teens and 20s, and has now become the country's leading cosmetics entrepreneur, packaging her products in pink and often gracing them with a seductive portrait of herself, Reuters reports. She claims that her mandatory two-year military service lasted only eight months because she was too sexy. "The army decided it would be better without me since everywhere I went, nobody worked," she said, according to the Reuters story.

Her newly-created party, Tnufah (Booster), seems to adhere to a centrist line and, Zacharia reports, Rosenblum is expected to win one seat.

"Pnina Rosenblum is like Israel's Madonna in that she took her image as a sex symbol and exploited it for her own empowerment," Jerusalem Post columnist Calev Ben-David told Zacharia.

And how does Rosenblum think that power would sit in the Knesset? "I think," she told Reuters, "that many of them would be happy to see something refreshing and new in the Knesset. Besides, I think it's time they had something pink to look at instead of gray."

New Scholarship on Why Women Love Mikvah

From time to time, LILITH lets readers know of recent academic work of particular interest to Jewish feminists.

Charlotte Fonrobert, "Women's Bodies, Women's Blood: On the Politics of Gender in Early Rabbinic Culture." PhD dissertation, Department of Near Eastern Studies, University of California at Berkeley.

The "politics of menstruation" would never have occurred to Jewish sages of yore. But delving into feminist critical theory and ancient Greco-Roman gynecological texts, Charlotte Fonrobert reveals traces of a feminine perspective within the male rabbinic discussions of menstrual impurity. One third-century Christian text describes a discussion between a Christian bishop and Jewish female converts to Christianity who wished to preserve rabbinic menstrual laws. This is among the pieces of evidence Fonrobert uses to demonstrate that the laws of *niddah* may have been perpetuated by women who valued both the seclusion mandated by the rabbinic laws and the religious identification with Judaism that it provided them when they lived among other peoples.

Jane Rothstein, joint doctoral program in History and Hebrew and Judaic Studies, New York University.

The laws of *taharat ha-mishpakha*, or family purity, are among the most complex and least widely practiced of all the *mitzvot.* They involve sexual separation between wife and husband for almost half of each month, and immersion in a *mikvah* (ritual bath) before resuming sexual contact. Pro-*mikvah* advocates bemoan the contemporary rejection of this practice with the refrain, "Your grandmothers chopped through frozen lakes in Russia to perform this *mitzvah.*"

But the survival of *mikvah* practices at all, Jane Rothstein maintains, can tell us much about how, more generally, Jewish women's religious observance survived the upheaval of immigration and acculturation to America. By examining purity manuals written between 1900 and 1940, Rothstein discovered that early 20th-century Orthodox rabbis depended on American practices—such as affirmations from doctors and "sexologists"—to sell the benefits of *mikvah* observance to married Jewish couples who might otherwise have been suspicious of the practice. The rhetoric of these *"niddah* books," Rothstein concludes, reveals more about Orthodoxy's accommodation to American culture than about women's ritual practices.

—Susan Sapiro

Holding Our Feminist Breaths

"LINE DANCE" BY SARA HARWIN

"Prayer is an absurd act," explained Rabbi Haskell Lookstein, quoting Rav Soloveitchik. "It makes no sense that a small finite person is addressing the infinite," he said to 2,000 participants at the opening plenary of the Second International Conference on Feminism & Orthodoxy, chaired by Blu Greenberg, this past February in New York City.

To this increasing and increasingly knowledgeable audience committed to traditional Jewish observance and to equal Jewish educational opportunity for women, he explained that you can see from the language of our prayers that we pray because of historical precedent. And rabbis are very protective of the forms of prayer we have inherited. "So I adjust my thinking to that form. Some prayers are just difficult, but they are still sacred. *Shelo asani isha*—that I was not created a woman—for instance," he said, "the *hazan* can say that prayer quietly so as not to insult anyone."

And regarding the addition of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah into the *Amidah* prayer where we are addressing ourselves to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? "Well they don't belong there. They were *not founders* of the Jewish people," he said.

The first Conference on Feminism & Orthodoxy, held in New York last year, was charged with excitement and rang a note of revolution in the Orthodox world. This year, it seemed to ring a quieter note of caution. Energy for a repair of women's social and economic situations remained, but an equal enthusiasm for their religious evolution seemed to flounder in the face of anxiety that they might be pushing Jewish law too far—or at least too fast.

> "Well, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah were not founders of the Jewish people," he said.

Dr. Tamar Ross, professor of philosophy at Bar Ilan University, said her bias is to defend the canon. She finds contrived ceremonies don't carry the same sacredness as traditional texts. Rabbanit Chana Henkin, dean and founder of Nishmat, led a workshop on "New Religious Leadership Roles for Women." She said she did not think it wise for women to demand the title of *poskot*, those who write new *halakha*. Rather we should concentrate our efforts on having as many learned women as possible who will naturally accrue *halakhic* authority. "If we can hold our collective feminist breaths, a miracle will happen under our eyes. It will happen, but not in the glare of the spotlight," she said.

On the other hand, the occasion of this second conference signaled an engagement with the gritty work of effecting change. Offered here were unprecedented opportunities for women to network and to brainstorm on ways that their social, economic, family and professional lives could be improved. In addition to six plenaries and nearly 50 workshops, the themes of lunch table affinity groups included: what if your husband is not (yet) a feminist; *shidduchim* (matchmaking); how to talk to rabbis; helping people in domestic abuse situations; and the role of rabbis in the Orthodox feminist setting.

At a workshop on "Single Women's Issues in the Community," questions from the audience challenged the social norms of Orthodox life: What about widows, especially older widows? ("It's hard to always be the one who is inviting—you lose your *koach* [strength]" and "It's hard to be invisible."). What about lesbians? What about finding a place in an Orthodox *shul* when a boy doesn't have a father he can sit with?

Zelda Stern, at a plenary luncheon, reminded participants that when they give *tzedaka* they have the power to effect change. When you are solicited, ask: What are the opportunities for girls to study at your school? How many women serve on your board of trustees?

Finally, after many talks by male rabbis about how *halakha* has changed, the conference closed with an admonishment—by Susan Aranoff, Bat Sheva Marcus and Leah Shakdiel—to the participants to identify themselves as feminists. You cannot say you want equal pay for equal work, or that you want equal access to the texts of your Jewish heritage, they said, without giving credit to a feminist agenda.

—Naomi Danis

In Case You Weren't There:

A complete set of 35 audio tapes of the conference is $175, from In-Phase, P.O. Box 600, Harris, NY 12742; individual tapes are $6.
e-mail EMcKee@idt.net
(They also have 1997 tapes.)

As an outgrowth of last year's conference, JOFA: Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance was founded as an advocacy and resource organization to explore the spiritual, intellectual, political and professional roles and opportunities of women as individuals and within the institutions of Orthodox Jewish life. JOFA. P.O. Box 1549, Paramus, NJ 07653-1549.

letters

Lilith welcomes letters to the editor, articles, fiction, poetry and memoirs. We reserve the right to edit letters for syntax and length.

Fondly, Faye

As the old cliche goes: I have good news and bad news. First, the good news: my colleagues have nominated me to be chair of the English department of George Washington University. This is an amazing trajectory for me—from G.W. B.A. at 40 to tenured professor at 65 to department chair. I have overcome my age, my gender, the resistence of G.W. to hire its own graduates, the abd [all but dissertation] on my PhD, my lack of academic credentials—on and on! The support for me was overwhelming and I feel so proud. But—and here comes the bad news—I must clear my decks in order to take on this challenge, and in order to leave myself any time at all for a writing life. (My most recent mss., a memoir in short stories, is under consideration as we speak—so to speak). Alas, I won't be able to be Lilith's fiction editor any longer, a labor of love, believe me. You honored me with the post, and I'm so grateful to have been a small part of a magazine I respect so much.

Faye Moskowitz
Washington, D.C.

[Lilith's staff and readers have benefitted hugely from the presence of gifted short-story writer Faye Moskowitz as fiction editor for the past several years. Not only have her fiction selections been wonderful, but her thoughtful comments to the writers whose works she read with such care were much appreciated.]

The Whole Megillah

Re: "Reclaiming Purim" (LILITH, Spring 1998). Here for the first time, the whole *megillah* by Rabbi Susan Schnur. It explains so much better than I can why I cannot celebrate Purim in the traditional ways—reading the *megillah,* dressing as Esther (certainly not Vashti) and stamping at the reading of the name of Haman—and finally killing Haman—and his entire family.

Three years ago I did an *oneg* at a small Reform synagogue in New York City drawing the connection between the way we learned about Purim and the silence in the Jewish community about family violence. This LILITH addresses both of these issues and more.

It's not that I feel vindicated—after all, I did speak out—but this LILITH is great.

Sandy Warshaw
New York, NY

A Joyful Roar

The Purim issue was magnificent for my soul. Thirty years, warrior of truth and passionate Jewish artist/prophetess vindicated. Know that I cried and each part seared my confidence in your LILITH spirits. . . . How dare we not mention our need to find our place in pre-patriarchal history . . . and to reclaim our roots in our deities that have been suppressed, suffocated annihilated . . . modeling our own people's annihilation. My joy in reading turned into a roar, finishing with Susan Schnur's opening article on sitting with her family at the synagogue, reflecting on Vashti.

Fanchon Shur
Cincinnati, OH

Vashti Was Right

I was thrilled to see Vashti discussed in your spring issue. For the past ten years, I have worn a homemade "Vashti was Right" button to Purim services. Also, when her name was mentioned, I would jump up and scream "Yeah Vashti." One year, while living on Staten Island, I was called up to read *megillah,* and included the line that the local NOW chapter (of which I was president) supported Vashti. The rabbi was not amused! This year at my Putnam Valley Reform Temple, I dressed as Vashti, wore my button, and again screamed "Yeah Vashti." I found a more receptive congregation.

I wish that more people could understand that supporting Vashti's position is not negating Esther's existence. If Esther had been asked to dance naked, she might have said no. If Vashti had been asked to dance naked to save her people she might have said yes.

Hope Blumenthal
New York, NY

It's Purim, After All

I enjoyed immensely Susan Schnur's speculations on the origins of hamentaschen, but I was taken aback by her characterization of the first two chapters of Esther as a "dangerous induction into woman-hating." After all, chapter three contains a patent polemic against Jews, yet no one is suggesting a rewrite because we all understand that these anti-Semitic sentiments come from the mouth of the evil Haman, who will soon receive his comeuppance.

Likewise, the misogynistic text that Schnur quotes from chapter one comes from the mouth of a pompous, sycophantic advisor to the king, and is signed into law by the same foolish king who will be shortly authorizing the casual genocide of his Jewish subjects. Are we to take it as the true message of the *megillah*?

It is certainly true that a close reading of chapter two gives a picture quite different from that of the "beauty contest" we all learned about in Hebrew school. Yes, the girls are brought in as virtual captives, to be sexually sampled by the king. And yes, Esther, the "winner" of the contest, wins the right to be that sexual captive of the king who is privileged to wear a crown and host her own parties. But I don't see this chapter as an endorsement of the king's methods. Rather it serves to highlight the courage and skill of Esther, as she negotiates the rescue of her people from a position of near powerlessness.

Rather than rewriting the first two chapters, why not greet those sexist lines with the same derisive merriment, hooting and cat-calls with which we greet the anti-Semitism portrayed in the later chapters? After all, it's Purim! For one day, we can fearlessly laugh in the face of our worst enemies, and believe the promise of the scroll: that the whole structure of misogyny and hatred is about to be turned upside down by a brave young woman with a secret identity.

Lise Weisberger
New York, NY

Baby-Boomers' Loss

The articles about "retarded" relatives were interesting, but I assumed it was only a problem of an older generation. Some years ago I worked for an organization that provides assisted housing for developmentally disabled adults, and they said that several times a year, particularly in the Bronx, the police would come to them for help—a baby boom-age developmentally disabled

adult was found when his/her elderly parent caretaker died.

Many times the neighbors hadn't even known the person existed. Baby boomers weren't institutionalized, missed the availability of mainstreaming or even special education services, and the parents were still afraid of opprobrium, so they kept them home. The opprobrium was real—I remember quite distinctly a developmentally disabled neighbor who was in my kindergarten class, and the teacher was merciless against her. The parents finally took her out of school in first grade, but I never knew where she went to school after that, as it was before special ed. classes. Some things we take for granted nowadays.

Nora Lee Mandel
Queens, NY

Divorce Ritual

My divorce is very imminent and I feel that I would like to mark this in a more personal way than just a piece of paper from the local court.

For me, divorce is a rite of passage as much as any other life-changing event. I am looking for some form of idea of ceremony or ritual that would help me express my feelings about this change in my life.

Other milestones in one's life have established forms of expression: puberty by a bat mitzvah, commitment to another by a wedding, death by a funeral, even menstruation by performing the ritual of the *mikvah*, etceteras and etceteras.

I thought that in America and especially amongst Jewish women's more feminist element, there would have been exploration of this type of thing. You said that you knew of a pamphlet on different rites of passage, which did touch on divorce.

Susan Goldstein
New York, NY

[For a packet of original LILITH articles on new rituals and celebrations, including those for divorce, send $12 (check or credit card) to LILITH, 250 West 57th Street, Suite 2432, New York, NY 10107; or e-mail your credit card order, with mailing address, to lilithmag@aol.com.]

Stolen Babies

The article about Yemenite babies ("Were Yemenite Babies Really Stolen?" Winter 1997) is the same story that friends of mine in Jerusalem suffered when they came from the Kurdish mountains of Iraq to Israel in the early 1950's. In the settlement camp they were told that their newborn daughter had died, but they knew otherwise. They learned later that a lot of their friends had the same experience. Since they had never lost babies in Iraq, why would this happen in Israel?

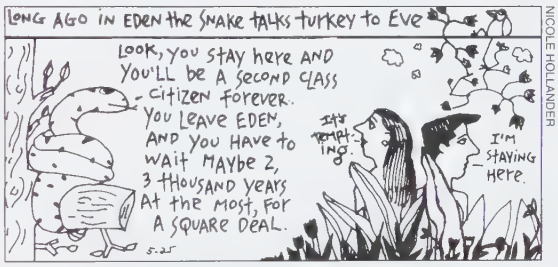
They learned many years later that their babies were being given to Holocaust survivors and, yes, after many years of dogged pursuit they did locate their daughter and were reunited after 21 years. This family, in the years since, lost a son in an Israeli war whose body was never found and had children maimed in Machaneh Yehudah by terrorist bombs. That is perhaps why they are politically right-wing.

There are hundreds, if not thousands, of such stories where the Sephardic community, thought of as being very fertile and not too worldly, would believe the Ashkenazim, who were running Israel in those days.

It is really a black mark for all of us.

Ita Aber
New York, NY

Meet the Matriarchs!


LONG AGO IN EDEN the SNAKE TALKS TURKEY to EVE
LOOK, YOU STAY HERE AND YOU'LL BE A SECOND CLASS CITIZEN FOREVER. YOU LEAVE EDEN, AND YOU HAVE to WAIT MAYBE 2, 3 THOUSAND YEARS AT THE MOST, FOR A SQUARE DEAL.
I'M STAYING HERE.
NICOLE HOLLANDER

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With utter grief and sorrow

Look Who's Haunting Glimmerglass

Lilith makes her debut in a new opera by Deborah Drattell

by Sarah Blustain

Composer Deborah Drattell got turned on to Lilith by a single word: "succuba."

"Do you know that word?" Drattell asks, excited about the term Webster's 2nd defines as "a woman demon supposed to descend upon and have intercourse with a man while he sleeps."

"She was called a succuba and I just thought, 'What a great word!' So my first concept of her was really this demon, this she-demon. Also, having been pregnant at the time and thinking of this woman squatting and giving birth to thousands of demonic babies—that was great!"

New York City Opera's composer-in-residence is markedly cheerful considering she's discussing one of the darkest figures of Jewish lore. But then again, the tormented, often literary, spirits that haunt Drattell's compositions don't seem to get her down. She has composed around works by Edgar Allan Poe and Sylvia Plath, and her opera about Russian poet Marina Tsvetaeva is entitled *A Captive Spirit.* The mysteriously disappeared Russian princess Anastasia is the apple of her eye.

"I see myself as a happy person," says Drattell, laughing at her own two-sided self. "I don't see myself as a dark person, but it's what I write, it's inside me. . . . What attracts me musically are dark things and brooding ideas and churning. Light happy music—I just can't do it." One attempt to engage more light-hearted material ended abruptly: "I just started to sweat, I broke out in a panic and just said, 'Oh my God, I can't.' . . . I can do one funny character, but I just couldn't write a funny opera." (We'll see how she does in her next project, a collaboration with the unquenchably funny Wendy Wasserstein about a New York lady doing *tashlich* in Central Park.)

* * *

There are no funny characters in *Lilith*, which will premiere as an unstaged production at the Glimmerglass Opera in Cooperstown, New York, in August. The drama begins at the newly filled grave of Adam, as Eve and her children confront their loss and the demon-children of Lilith demand their birthright. Explains Eve to her frightened children: "From the past these creatures come/beating on a demon's drum. . . . Their torn and twisted souls were born/To the man whom we all mourn."

Drattell says she had to kill off Adam because "I wanted the opera to be about Eve and Lilith and their confrontation, and how Eve was going to cope with Adam's death and how she was going to confront the whole concept of Lilith finally. . . . Lilith was always present, even throughout Adam's union with Eve. What Eve is saying is, 'I had to contend with you throughout my whole marriage.'"

In Drattell's fantasies, Eve and Lilith are not so much characters of mythology as our emotional and psychological peers. "I can think of so many people I have known whose husbands have mistresses and they decide, 'Well, okay, I'm going to close my eyes and not pay attention to it because the other things I have are more important to me,'" she says, explaining Eve. "But then what happens when he's gone? What happens to all that anger that you've repressed over all those years, and all the things you think you didn't get and how unfulfilled you were?" As for Lilith's turn toward evil, Drattell is sympathetic: She "was repressed. She asserted herself and then [received] all this condemnation afterwards. So what happens when you suppress somebody and their desires? It kind of goes awry."

Drattell has a lot of compassion for Eve and Lilith and, with librettist David Steven Cohen, struggled to understand that in this Jewish version of the Madonna-whore syndrome, each role carries its benefits and its bur-

dens. "It's not good versus evil," Drattell says. "I think the two of them really add up to what we would want to be the ultimate and complete woman. A mother and a nurturer and yet this dark seductress, in-control type of person, so it really adds up to what I think a lot of women strive for today."

* * *

Drattell's own relationship with this team of women is complicated. On the one hand, she's the good Orthodox wife, married to the descendent of eight generations of Orthodox rabbis, maintaining a Jewish home, and caring for her four children, ages two, four, six and eight. Her day begins with dressing and feeding her three eldest children, making them lunch, driving them to school, and handing the littlest one off to a babysitter. "And then," entering her parallel life, "I come back and eat breakfast and I write." In a room with a piano, where children are not invited, she leaves the can-do world of Jewish mothering for the more secular, distraught material through which, intellectually, she thrives.

"I guess what I identify most with are women," she tells me, reflecting on her choice of subjects. "I don't put myself in the same category as these women who've struggled . . . but certainly the difficulty of trying to have a career in a man's world and a man's profession, and also trying to have a family, being a mother."

As we make our way through the shopping district of Drattell's Orthodox neighborhood in Brooklyn, we join a crowd of agitated women doing their last-minute shopping on a Thursday afternoon. On Fridays they cook, Saturdays they rest. But Thursdays this avenue heats up as women squeeze into a tiny vegetable stand and, in the intimate kosher supermarket, elbow their way toward the brisket.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Stollman," a stock boy says amiably to Drattell, who, negotiating the small grocery space with a cart and her two-year-old child, is gently fretting over the selection of meat.

I look at the stock boy, confused. For the past hour, I have been chatting with the composer-in-residence of the New York City Opera, whose work has been characterized by the dark and brooding character at its core. Though she lives in this religious neighborhood, and her four young children have made brief appearances with their babysitter, I have thought of her neither as a mother, nor as Orthodox, and certainly not as a *Mrs.* Anybody. Surprised at this transformation, I suggest to Drattell/Stollman that despite her very cosmopolitan life in the operatic community, she fits right in here as well.

"Yeah," she laughs cynically. "I'm wearing my hat, but I have my sandals on and I'm not wearing stockings. I stick out like a sore thumb."

Though she has made compromises to live here—she doesn't wear pants in the neighborhood because "it just becomes too much of a statement. People treat your kids differently"—she insists that she's not going to "squash" her career to conform. "I was brought up in a certain tradition with a certain kind of music that I was brought up to hear and that's part of who I am and that's what I want to write, so I'm also not going to *not* do that because maybe it's not in vogue."

Was she afraid that choosing one of Jewish lore's primary demons might anger or disturb her religious community? "I really don't weigh things like that. If I did I'd have to sit all day long and think about everything I did, you can imagine, should I do this, should I not do this, can I do this, lelele. I sort of define for myself how I'm going to live and I try to do it the best way I can." ■

May the Curse Be Broken

If Lilith, the mythological figure, was cursed, she's passed that on to her operatic descendent. (Let us only add that not *all* Lilith's namesakes have been so fated.) This work, first written as an orchestral piece, was originally scheduled to premiere nine years ago with the Denver Symphony, where Drattell was doing her residency. "The music critic from the Rocky Mountain News called to say the orchestra was going to fold. So I sat there in a state of shock—actually I was pregnant—and I realized, not only was I not going to have this piece, it was not going to be performed, it was not going to be recorded and I was out of a job. So this," she says laughing at her own misfortune, "was my first Lilith experience."

The curse, however, continued. The sets had already been designed for Lilith, the opera, rehearsals had been essentially concluded, and The New York Times, in a full-scale feature about Drattell and her opera, announced one Sunday that the piece would open three days hence. Careful readers of the Times, however, might have noticed an item just one day earlier announcing the opera's cancellation over labor disputes.

The curse, however, appears to be broken: Lilith, the opera, will be performed at the Glimmerglass Opera, in Cooperstown, New York, on August 16 at 8 p.m. Tickets are $10 for the general public, $8 for students. For tickets, please call (607) 547-2255.

(Laugh)

Sex, Power and Our Rabbis

Readers Respond

to "Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach's Shadow Side" by Sarah Blustain, LILITH, Spring 1998

Three years after the death of Shlomo Carlebach, LILITH began hearing women's allegations of inappropriate sexual advances made to girls as young as 12, and inappropriate middle-of-the-night sexually charged phone calls to adult women Carlebach hardly knew. As LILITH was preparing a report on these accusations, we received pleas—and a few threats—attempting to stop publication.

Missing from the reasoned and often poignant signed opinions below is the rage of anonymous negative responses sent via e-mail or posted on an AOL bulletin board even after the Spring issue appeared in print. These hostile reactions were not to the women in the article itself, but to the very notion that Shlomo Carlebach could have transgressed: "Whether the allegations are true or not is not the issue, the issue is the defemation [sic] of the name of a great man." "Nothing Rabbi Carlebach may or may not have done isn't anywhere near as disgusting as accusing someone who is no longer here to defend himself." "Lilith magazine is an open and notorious radical feminist lesbian oriented rag. They consider consensual sex between male and female to be abuse. . ." "Why pick on one Rabbi? Far less great Rabbis have had affairs with women. . . . The man had powers beyond this world—so watch out. I hope you get yours for this unnecessary injustice."

Missing also from the letters that appear below is the verbal shrug with which some in the Jewish community greeted the article: "Of course. Everybody knew this was going on," as if universal acknowledgment were any substitute for taking action against abuses.

"Yes, It Did Happen"

What a fluke it was that I happened to read the article in Lilith about Shlomo Carlebach's "shadow side." I have never read this publication before; in fact, I do not read any Jewish publications, and I do not belong to any Jewish organizations. How long has it been? Thirty years?

A year or two ago, I mentioned Shlomo Carlebach to a friend. I don't remember exactly why I brought it up. I told her about the late-night phone calls with Shlomo when I was sixteen. She listened. What's more, she took what I said to heart, and remembered. Then, just a few weeks ago, this friend (a librarian who reads everything) noticed an article from the Forward [newspaper], a short article that discussed Sarah Blustain's piece in Lilith. She sent the article to me. I wolfed it down as if I had been alone on a desert island without a word from anyone.

My first reaction: YES. It did really happen. It was real. My next reaction: Yes. Of course it must have happened to other women. Why didn't I think of that? Why didn't I do anything?

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To reach an independent "warmline" of therapists to discuss concerns raised by LILITH's article, call (800) 528-2672.

After reading this article in Lilith, I discovered that I was not alone. You must understand that when I was a girl, like most others, I was caught between a rock and a hard place. The rock being ignorance; the hard place being submission. I was raised in a family structure based on the old ethics: a child was to be quiet, obedient, to speak when spoken to, to say "yes" always, without questions. And I was good, very good.

When the question is raised, why did I wait so long to speak up, I feel compelled to explain. The short answer is that I was afraid, so I kept quiet. Quiet breeds a kind of superficial calm, and then it becomes a habit, like walking with a slight limp that you hardly notice after a while.

Not only is the life of a young person caught between a rock and a hard place, it is also obscured by the fog of vulnerability mixed with new unnamed sensations of longing, alienation, and self-doubt. What easy prey I was. I did not know the terms of power, sexuality and abuse. My notions of love were linked to fairy tales of lost maidens being rescued by princely powerful men.

I had no words for how I felt in that phone booth in the hallway of our dormitory, late at

night, so late that even the most outrageous of students had gone to sleep long before. There I was, trying to hold the receiver to my ear because I was shaking so badly I could not keep the phone still. I was verbally undressed, item by item, and by his questions asked to reveal those items and tell him what was underneath. I was taken to a remote island and told to describe our embrace. If he had been breathing heavily, I would not have known it, so taken up was I with shaking. If I had recognized his heavy breathing, I would not have known what it meant. If I had even known what it meant I would not have had the courage to confront a great rabbi. What could a young girl do who was so overcome with shaking, and who was I, after all, to speak?

Finally, after many phone calls, I was able to hang up on him. I escaped. Over the course of the last 30 years, the distance between Shlomo and me has grown so enormous that in between lie whole regions of faith, trust and intimacy.

Some might ask, why bring up such a small, relatively benign incident? There was no gun held to my head. There were no bruises on my legs or arms. What's to show? Why make all this noise about a few indiscretions?

Here is what shows. Since those late-night phone calls from Shlomo, I have had shaking fits, particularly when approaching any situation of intimacy.

In reference to the one who said about Lilith's article, "Whatever negative there is to say there [are] a million positives you could choose," I am forced to respond to this numeric equation. First of all, what is one? What is a million? I am one person, who, but for a fluke of coincidences, would have stayed hidden in silence. It begs the question: how many more might there be?

Then, to stay with the numbers a little longer, I will say that I am, perhaps, not one. Consider that I carry an illness with me. This illness can be infectious. My daughter, who is now a teenager, asks questions about Judaism. I see her yearnings toward spirituality and understanding. She would like to see what it's like to belong to a synagogue. She will have to find her own way there. I cannot go near a place of worship without feeling the tension build. My teeth clamp shut.

I have three children. How far does the infection spread if the illness is not addressed? These children will have children. They will interact with others. So how many is that all together?

Abigail Grafton said, in the beginning of the article, "He was the first person to ordain women, to take down the *mechitza,* and I think he thought all boundaries were off." I, however, suspect that he recognized the boundary and knew all too well that he crossed it wrongly. I understand the silence he kept, which was not unlike my own. If I do not address this terrible thing I do, if I do not speak of it, the shame will lessen. I can imagine how he paid his dues. His humility and generosity must have been paid out with a fair measure of guilt. His compassion for the lost must have been tied to his own wandering soul. I do not sully his name. Those who seek to withhold the truth about him sully his name by raising it too high above the circle of accountability.

Neila Carlebach is quoted in the Forward article, saying, "Jewish law absolutely forbids negative talk about someone who's left the world, especially someone who was a rebbe." I am sorry, but the Jewish law has no jurisdiction over me; I've slipped out of the circle in that place where the laws were already broken.

Nowadays I take my spiritual leadership from the compassionate stranger, the tranquillity of a tree in bloom, the artless beauty of my children as they fling themselves into life without fear. I have never written a letter to an editor before. I am not one to complain. Let me emphasize again that I have no agenda, no wish to cause harm, only to add my name to the list. Consider how many historical precedents there are: the deification of those in power, the lack of accountability that encourages the abuses of power, the cover-ups, the fear. We know the routine; we should be sick to death of it by now.

There are some aspects to faith that defy reasoning, whose progress is anything but linear or clear. Consider that this letter of testimony and my own quietly real name at the end of it, is a small gesture towards that faith.

Anita Feng
Issaquah, WA

> Why did I wait so long to speak up? I was afraid.

Blackening All That Is Good

There is no dark or shadow side to Reb Shlomo Carlebach. The only dark side is the *sitra acha,* the other side, whose designs and fabrications are meant to blacken and tear down all that is good in a person.

During the time that I knew Reb Shlomo, I once asked him about hugging women in public. He told me that there is a love that is pure and holy that we sometimes feel when we meet and hug someone who we have not seen in a long time. One may experience this love when your child or someone you love has just escaped unhurt from a major accident, and your heart is filled with thankfulness to HaShem.

I am sure that Reb Shlomo's embracing all Jews, together with his melodious outflow of *niggunim,* has brought many lost souls back to Judaism. If the saving of just one life is akin to saving a world, then Reb Shlomo in his lifetime has saved an untold galaxy.

He did warn me never to be closeted alone with a woman. If one finds oneself alone in a room with someone of the opposite sex, brother [or sister] get out as fast as you can. This is the *halakha,* which one must be careful to observe at all times, over and above any appearance of immodesty in public.

I am sure that if any incident did arise that was in any way indiscreet, Reb Shlomo immediately would have done *teshuvah* and would have made amends to anyone he may have embarrassed, either publicly or privately.

Irwin Frank
Far Rockaway, NY

Due Respect

I write to join the many others who must be protesting the article about Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach. I protest, not because he was perfect, but because he is dead, and therefore deserves the respect that all the dead do. It is disrespectful to his memory to print such an article now that he is gone. No one who is serious claims that he was perfect, but that is not the issue. To tear down the name of someone who cannot defend himself if innocent or do *teshuvah* if he is guilty is contrary to Jewish ethics. Surely, if these women were hurt or traumatized, they had ample opportunity to sue or to confront or to do whatever they needed to do over the years before he died. Even then, there must be better ways to heal than by putting the stories into a public magazine. Lilith should have used better judgement.

Rabbi Jack Riemer
Boca Raton, FL

Flawed Human

What to do with wonderful spiritual teachings from a person who has been accused of committing acts of sexual misconduct? The lessons of this piece reflect the divergent sides of too many leaders: highly spiritual yet predatory sexual perpetrators. Just as the child in Solomon's court could not be split to live, the reality of a human being cannot be split. The strengths and weaknesses need to be studied in unison to experience the real meaning of being human: flawed and struggling, not perfect and godlike.

All too often, when there are allegations of sexual misconduct, defenders surround the named perpetrators with unquestioning support so as not to feel their own sense of betrayal, acknowledge their own personal foibles, or more deeply explore the teachings as given. Detractors/critics attack the named person by throwing out all of the virtues/

"Oy, this needs such a fixing"

—Shlomo Carlebach, when confronted with accusations of sexual misconduct.

In many respects the article in Lilith shocked and pained many of us who knew Rabbi Carlebach so well, but privately it surprised few of us. This article has rightfully sparked vehement debate among many of those who were inspired by Shlomo's songs and teachings over the years. Although I understand the anger and resentment of publicly bringing to light these deficiencies after his death, I think that this article has the potential to fix something that Shlomo, for reasons we will never know, could not do.

Let me say that it is likely that some of the women quoted may have been motivated to speak after the publication of *Holy Brother,* a collection of stories, largely anecdotal and hagiographic, about Shlomo's life. This book, although enjoyable reading, does little to represent the complexities and contradictions that lie at the root of Shlomo Carlebach. I want to speak of those who have chosen to vilify the women quoted in the article, the author, and Lilith Magazine, instead of taking this opportunity for communal reflection and *tikkun.*

First, this article was written with tact, respect and journalistic respectability. It was not vindictive, confrontational or one-sided. Second, the emergence of these issues in a pubic forum is, in many ways, an important test for those who consider Shlomo their rebbe. To inherit the teachings of a master is also to inherit their deficiencies and work to resolve and fix that which the master could not fix in his lifetime. Shlomo's sexual misconduct was a reality, as Shlomo would say, "simple as it is . . ." The brilliance and depth of his teachings were also a reality and remain intact in light of his weaknesses. Yet to ignore or, worse, to deny the weakness is to do injustice to his entire message.

From the Hasidic tradition of mid-19th century Poland, Shlomo learned and transmitted some important teachings of our time. First, that honesty is a way of piety. When he comically referred to himself and others as "holy sinners" he meant it deeply. As human beings we are flawed. The only way to correct our flaws is to confront them head on, not to deflect them. He was openly critical of Hasidic societies' mistreatment of women, suffering greatly for his honesty yet opening doors toward rectifying this problem. He never excluded himself from the community of "holy sinners." It is only some of his disciples, who I believe have misunderstood his message, who are trying to make Shlomo a *Zaddik*, a concept that he did not advocate and was not a central part of his teaching.

In my mind, the most poignant phrase of this article was Shlomo's response to being confronted with sexual misconduct, "Oy, this needs such a fixing." Shlomo was not able to do it. Now it is up to his disciples. I firmly believe that a general apology for Shlomo's actions should be made public, in this forum or any other, by those who consider themselves his disciples. As we study The Ethics of the Fathers from Passover to Shavuot we should be reminded of the rabbinic dictum (loosely translated), "When a person of integrity is not present, strive to be that person." This is our challenge. I thank Lilith for giving all of us the opportunity for *tikkun*, Shlomo's and our own.

Shaul Magid
New York, NY
[The writer is a professor of Jewish Thought at the Jewish Theological Seminary.]

gifts/lessons given because these teachings are now seen as tainted/fraudulent.

Teachers can be gifted spiritual leaders, capable of deeply appreciating Jewish wisdom and essence, and able to share insight in powerfully meaningful ways. Those leaders can also be fearfully abusive, incapable of following their own spiritual connections and thereby turning to feed their ego needs by hurting others at almost any cost.

In light of the allegations, perhaps the greatest lesson Carlebach can teach is the need to honestly see and learn from the whole person. We owe it to ourselves and our leaders to speak out when we see, hear, or experience a betrayal. We are commanded to not stand by the blood of our neighbors. We have a duty to rebuke and help our leaders maintain appropriate boundaries.

Jan Singer
Rabbi Arthur Gross Schaefer
Los Angeles, CA

[Jan Singer is a psychotherapist who works with people who have been sexually exploited by therapists or clergy. Arthur Gross Schaefer teaches legal and business ethics. Both have worked within the Reform movment to address rabbinic sexual misconduct.]

Confronting Abuse

Had it not been for this piece—so different from the other praise-filled eulogies for Rabbi Carlebach that inundated the Jewish press—I would have never been aware that members of the Jewish renewal community and others were engaging in a painful and belated, yet utterly necessary, process of truth-telling and catharsis.

When I came to New York a few years ago, shortly before Rabbi Carlebach's death, I immediately began to hear stories of his "womanizing." I met a number of Carlebach devotees and ex-devotees who had witnessed or experienced his unacceptable behavior, and I was appalled at what I perceived to be general tolerance of it among many people with whom I spoke on the Upper West Side. "Shlomo just can't help it," I was told.

It is bad enough when someone without Rabbi Carlebach's fame and stature harasses or physically abuses women under the cloak of silence. Needless to say, our community's inability to openly confront Rabbi Carlebach's problem while he was alive and attend to the psychological, emotional, and spiritual scars of his victims is more troubling still. What does this reveal about the moral courage of our community? Are we afraid to demand standards of sexual decency from our leaders?

Sexual harassment and abuse must be addressed judicially in Jewish classrooms if we are ever to empower our community to deal with these problems effectively. My article, "Sexual Harassment and Jewish Education" (Tikkun, January/February '94) suggests a practical approach, grounded in Jewish texts, for grappling with a dilemma that is larger than the larger-than-life Rabbi Carlebach.

Carmela Ingwer
Forest Hills, NY

Sex, Spirit and Abuse

Re: Rabbi Arthur Waskow's comments on unethical sexual behavior by rabbis and teachers: If Kabbalah can lead to such a skewed view of the reality as you presented, then I want no part of its enlightenment.

Sexual violence (including dry-humping of young teens) is not, cannot, be understood as an aspect of the holy power of *chesed* [loving-kindness]. Sexual violence is an evil. If the stories told in Lilith are true, then Carlebach was a *rasha*. Elevating one woman's (or man's) soul will never be an excuse for murdering another.

And those who knew of these matters but kept silent are also guilty. A person who knew of these matters shared in the violence done to every woman and girl who was attacked by Carlebach's evil. Jeff Roth's [response] in the article was impressive. He recognized that even his refusal to play along with Shlomo was not enough. Those who knew and did nothing must also seek repentance to return to the truth of God and their true selves.

Rabbi Robert Levy
Ann Arbor, MI

[The writer is chair of the Mayor's Task Force for Increasing Safety for Women.]

> Support the victims. Don't protect the memory of an idolized leader.

Heed the Rabbis!

An honest assessment of the Carlebach phenomenon should take into account one additional factor not mentioned in your article. As far back as 35 years ago, Shlomo Carlebach was kept at arm's distance by the Roshei Yeshiva of the ultra-Orthodox. In his disregard of the traditional boundaries and strictures separating the sexes, the rabbis sensed precisely those predilections that are only now first being exposed. For this they were vilified as being obscurantist and cruelly intolerant. Think of how much damage could have been averted had they been taken seriously at the time!

Rabbi Heshy Grossman
Jerusalem, Israel

A Call to Action

Thank you for having the courage to break the silence in print about Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach. Author Sarah Blustain and Lilith Magazine deserve the community's respect and gratitude for prioritizing the need to speak the truth and support the victims and survivors of Rabbi Carlebach's abusive behavior instead of giving in to community pressure to protect the memory of an idolized leader.

In spite of the excellence of the article, it left me concerned about key issues: the potential misrepresentation of what good practice by other rabbis might be; the pressure to forgive and forget quickly; and the need for Jewish communal responsibility in dealing with issues of sexual misconduct.

Certainly, victims can't take comfort from the fact that rabbis such as Jeff Roth and Daniel Siegel never translated the underpinnings of Elat Chayyim and ALEPH's code of ethics into direct action regarding Shlomo Carlebach's abusive behavior, even though he wasn't on their staff. It was not good enough that Roth intended to "have a serious discussion about [the] innuendoes" or that Siegel "stopped inviting Shlomo, though I never told him why."

It is all the more alarming that ALEPH's primary response to the issues raised in the article is Arthur Waskow's disturbing treatise that, incredibly, mistakes *chesed* rather than Carlebach's unchecked power as the cause of his abusive behavior, and rationalizes Carlebach's actions as being about "overflowing energy."

It was also clear from the article that the pressure to forgive and forget is already on. The pressure on Lilith not to print this article points to the Jewish community's deep denial, fear, and pain regarding issues of sexual and domestic violence, especially when religious leaders are the perpetrators. Women who feel they were hurt by Carlebach need the community's support, not prescriptive recommendations about forgiveness, right now. They are the ones who should determine the pace of forgiveness.

The pressure to forgive and to forget is already on.

Freedom from sexual and domestic violence will not come from silencing or discrediting the voices of victims and survivors, but only from building communities of justice that do not ignore, rationalize or excuse these abuses of power. We must educate our religious leaders and communities about these issues, develop cooperative relationships with professionals who can work with victims and abusers, hold perpetrators accountable for their crimes, and engage Jewish community members of all ages in active prevention initiatives. Let the article in Lilith serve as a call to action so that we can transform the Jewish community into a safe and nurturing space, where attitudes and behaviors that contribute to an atmosphere of violence against women are never tolerated.

Randi Donnis
Boston, MA

[The author works with interfaith nonprofit groups dedicated to ending domestic violence through educational and advocacy work with religious communities.]

Warned Not to Speak

I would like to commend Sarah Blustain on the integrity and sensitivity of her article. Shlomo taught his students that one of the most significant responsibilities that we have in life is how we view the other, because the other sees our perception of her/him in our eyes. What was being done to the women and girls who would see their reflection in Shlomo's lustful eyes? Did they see themselves as comrades, as fellow Jews, or did Shlomo help them see themselves as objects, as "the great temptation."

This past winter, in response to a related on-line dialogue between several friends and myself, we received a "warning" about posting our conversation. The writer stated:

"I recommend that you look into *Masechet Brachot 19a* in the section which begins 'R. Yehoshua ben Levi said: Whoever disparages the memory of a Torah Scholar' . . . The warning is too dark and heavy for me to even write them. However, this same Gemorah says, 'If you see a Torah scholar commit a transgression by night, harbor no ill thoughts of him by day for perhaps he repented . . . Do you think that the most one can say is that perhaps he repented? Surely not! Rather, say that SURELY he has repented! . . . But this applies only to personal matters, i.e. to sins of a private nature.' What Reb Shlomo may have done in the past is wrong and it is our duty to see it as it is. But at the same time, we are equally obligated to ASSUME he had mended his ways before leaving this world, which I personally believe he sincerely did. And even if I didn't, I have a Torah obligation to judge a Torah scholar favorably, especially when they are dead."

The disturbing nature of this "warning" is obvious. I commend Lilith for the courage to publish the article.

Gloria Z. Greenfield
Lexington, MA

In Europe, Too

Thank you for having published that important article about Shlomo Carlebach, who was also in Europe for concerts. I share some of the experiences you described.

I. Weiss
Berlin, Germany

He Serenaded "the Ladies"

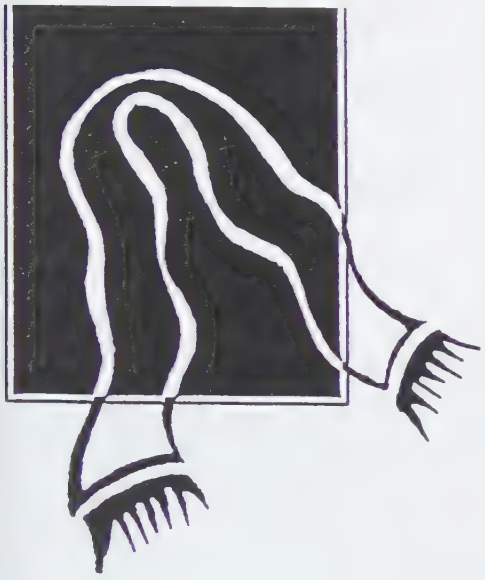
Re: your important piece on Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach: He was not with the Women of the Wall at the *Kotel* in 1989. The ceremony began *out of* doors and continued in a school, not far from our hotel. He came to serenade "you noble ladies" when we, the International Committee for Women of the Wall, donated a Torah to the woman of Jerusalem from women outside Israel. Shlomo had a dark and shadow side, but he had a joyous, loving side too. We must weigh both; one does not diminish the other.

Phyllis Chesler
Brooklyn, NY ■

BAT MITZVAH IN THE 90'S

ORIGINAL ARTICLES FROM LILITH

the independent Jewish women's magazine



BAT MITZVAH IN THE 90'S
by Vivienne Kramer

New rituals and ideas on this rite of passage.

THE BAT MITZVAH DRESS
by Nechama Liss-Levinson

A mother recalls her own Bat Mitzvah as she helps her daughter search for "the dress."

SHABBAT AT THE NURSING HOME
by Susan Schnur

Volunteer work leads to a creative location for one young woman's Bat Mitzvah.

BAT MITZVAH PRAYER
by Menorah Lebowitz Rotenberg

A mother's blessing for her daughter.

BAR/BAT MITZVAH: EVERY FAMILY'S RITE OF PASSAGE
an interview with Judy Davis, Ed.D.

Psychologist Davis discusses ritual, food, and the mother's role during B'not Mitzvah.

AN EDITORIAL
by Susan Weidman Schneider

A young woman's Bat Mitzvah with the Women of the Wall.

SUING DAD: BAT MITZVAH IN THE DIVORCE CROSSFIRE
by Marla Ruth Allison

When religious education becomes a tool to gain visitation rights.

ADULT BAT MITZVAH: CHANGING WOMEN, CHANGING SYNAGOGUES
by Ruth Mason

Why increasing number of women are studying Torah.

THE BACK OF MEN'S HEADS
by Hedy Markowitz

A Kurdish Bar Mitzvah at the Western Wall.

WHO ARE OUR MODELS?
by Gloria Och

A Bat Mitzvah address on bibilical women.

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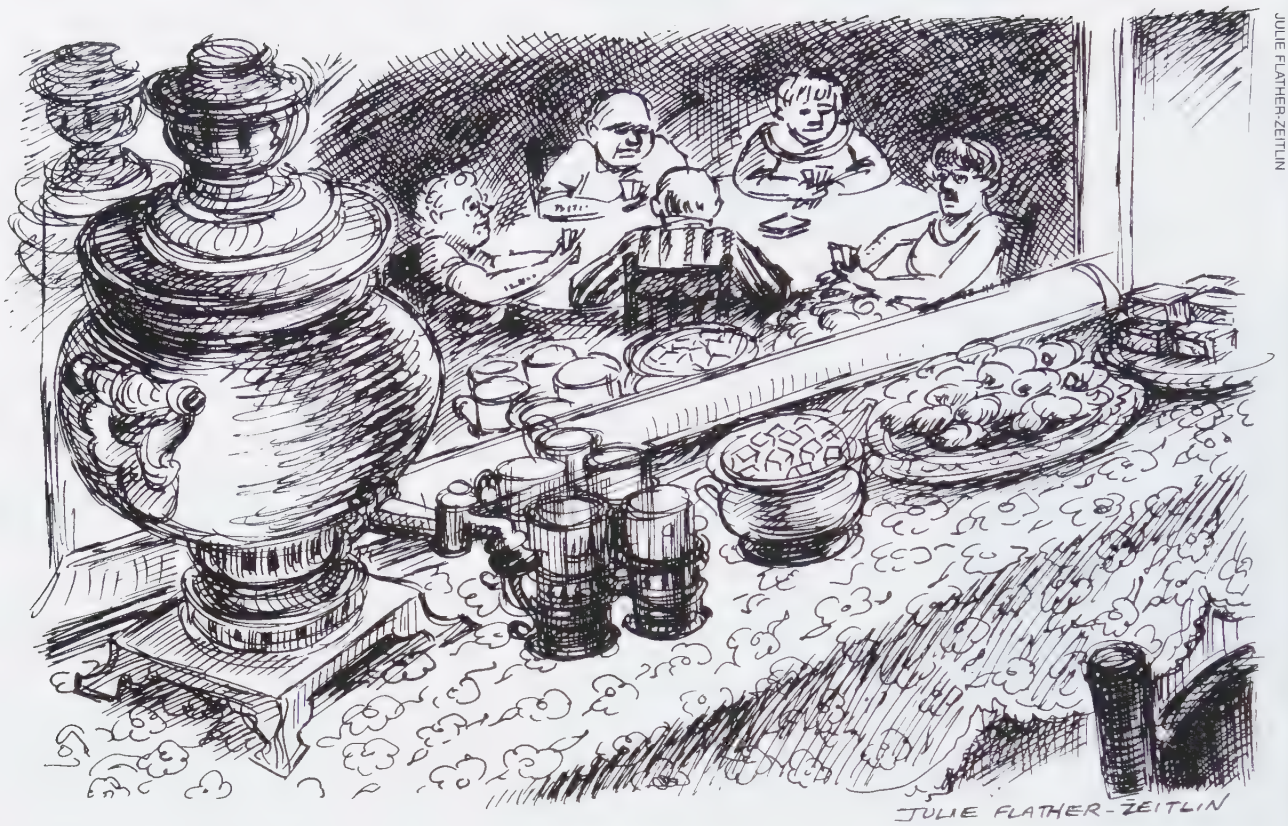

JULIE FLATHER-ZEITLIN

Holocaust Survivors Play Poker

by Rachel Goldstein

Every week they assemble,
Hanka, Gusta, Mayer, Hala,
and Sam, to test their luck again.

Seared blue-veined numbers,
in ragged formation
line up across their arms.

Five cards for everyone,
select the ones to keep: pairs,
any three or four of the same.

They place their bets
on what they hold,
or hope to hold.

No one speaks, the air is
shaved by numbered cards
their lots are drawn.

They always stop for tea,
peeled apples, sliced, and oranges,
on an altar of white lace.

Rows of European
tortes and rugellah, herring,
shmaltz on gold-rimmed plates.

The men strain
tea through cubes of sugar
gripped by their teeth.

The smoke of cousin Sam's
cigar hangs above mounds of food,
like a burned offering.

And someone says,
as someone always does,
"Ah, let's enjoy now."

Rachel Goldstein, born in Germany after WWII, is the daughter of Holocaust survivors. A resident of Newton, Massachussetts, Goldstein works for Facing History and Ourselves, a national educational organization that trains teachers to help students understand the complexities of anti-Semitism and racism.

And Hannah said, "I am not drunk, I am praying for a child."

Samuel I, 1:16

In Pursuit of **Motherhood**

Infertility, Adoption and . . .

Moving through one's childbearing years in the Jewish community, it is impossible not to notice —beside all the new babies and growing children—the insistent presence of couples struggling with infertility, of late-marrying women sprinting against the clock to become mothers, and of adopted children of non-Caucasian hues who increasingly are an ordinary part of many North American Hebrew school classrooms.

As a group, we Jewish women are highly educated, and we delay our marriages and childbearing until our schooling is complete—thus putting ourselves more at risk for infertility problems. (We are twice as likely as non-Jewish Caucasian American women to remain unmarried into our forties.) Judaism's pronatalist tendencies—amplified by our fervent wish to compensate Holocaust losses, Jews' comfort with pursuing medical interventions, our basic "leave no stone unturned" mentality, and our economic wherewithal—all combine to make us major consumers of high-level infertility interventions. We also, as a people, have a strong sense of our own efficacy, believing deeply in our free will and in our ability to make things happen. Unlike more fatalistic religious groups, we do not accept the unacceptable lying down.

The following four essays present different windows into these issues of many Jewish women's lives. "Sarah's Laugh," by Karen Propp, considers what it means for an infertile women to travel far in her grief, using our foremothers Rachel, Hannah and Sarah as guides. "King Solomon's Knife," by Diane Cole, challenges the received Solomonic "wisdom" that biology determines motherhood, and that two women have only one option—fisticuffs—when there is but one baby. Pushing at the margins of the empathy envelope, Cole brings to life two mothers in childbirth, straining, sweating, worn—only one of them delivering a newborn who cries.

In the third piece, "Jewish Adoption," Michele Kriegman shatters myths about Jewish adoption, including the canard that most adoptable Jewish children end up in Jewish homes, and that one's odds, as potential adoptive parents, are bad. An adoptee herself, Kriegman shares insights about how to make an adopted child feel truly whole and at home in her/his Jewish community. Finally, Susan Kahn, in "Putting Jewish Wombs to Work," explains why Israel has more fertility clinics per capita than any other country in the world. If you are a candidate for in vitro fertilization treatment, you might be interested to know that in Israel, married or not, you are eligible for up to seven rounds of in vitro fertilization treatment at the state's expense!

Here, then, are some Jewish women's issues around infertility and adoption. LILITH hopes, through presenting these essays, to deepen our dialogue.

—Susan Schnur

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by Karen Propp

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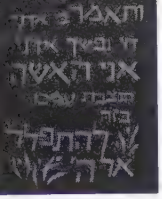


In Pursuit of
Fertility

Sarah's Laugh

How Infertile Women Deal

by Karen Propp

In Hebrew scriptures, barren women are fierce with grief. "Give me children or I shall die!" cries Rachel. Hannah calls herself "a woman in great trouble," and when Eli the priest sees her praying in the temple in Shiloh she appears so disturbed he mistakes her for drunk. "I have been speaking from the depths of my grief and resentment," she tells him. But how do infertile women grieve today? Every month that one fails to conceive is a loss. Every miscarriage is a tiny death.

IN THE ECHO CHAMBER BY GRACE BAKST WAPNER. COURTESY OF STEINBAUM KRAUSS GALLERY

After three failed artificial inseminations, I have some experience with that grief. I have replaced the phrase *When* I have a baby with *If.* And now my doctor has recommended an in vitro fertilization cycle. The prospect of hypodermic needles, hormonal drugs, and operating rooms terrifies me. I know no one else who has gone through in vitro, and I am desperate to talk to people who have. Although I am not a joiner of support groups—I find them cloying and oppressive, and am easily embarrassed by the public sharing of one's private life they demand—I decide to give one a try. Perhaps I'll make a friend or two.

On a June evening long with light and perfumed with new blooms, I set off for my first meeting. I bicycle along the path that borders the Charles River, and for a moment I am one of the many who are happy to be out playing or walking or lolling about tonight. Then I turn onto one of the genteel, cobblestone side streets near Harvard Square and find the address: a newly built townhouse, complete with skylights and redwood deck. The woman who answers the door is tanned and fit. She waves me inside and up a flight of stairs to the living room, where several other women sit around a coffee table laden with grapes, cookies, and juice.

"Hi, I'm Karen."

"Cheryl."

"Mara."

The social worker who will lead the group sits in a soft armchair. Her hair is pulled back in a ponytail; she wears orthopedic sandals. Now she bends forward to listen to the woman sitting beside her.

Small talk is awkward—this is the group's first meeting and we are all strangers. Even so, everyone seems enormously grateful to be here among others who will understand the isolating experience that infertility often is. Four, five women arrive. We are ten women sitting close beside one another. I look around the circle to see who we are: early thirties to early forties, white, upper-middle-class, our faces marred by a stricken expression that no amount of make-up and nervous smiles can cover. We speak in voices too high-pitched, too low-pitched, or not at all. Yes, we are troubled.

As the meeting comes to order, our hostess's twenty-something husband tramps in on his way to another part of the house and grins sheepishly at the living room full of women. This is not his meeting or gender, and tonight at least, trying to have a child is not his problem. Tennis racket in hand, covered in sweat, he is handsome in athletic shorts and T-shirt; an all-American guy, the type voted most likely to succeed.

We soon hear about this model husband: he has sperm antibodies, which means that his body attacks and destroys his own seed. Perhaps that explains his sheepish grin. Tonight, his wife will speak. Although it is his condition that is supposedly "causing" their infertility, so far she has not responded well to treatment. She has "failed" one in vitro cycle. "But I produced twenty-two egg follicles," she says, putting her hand across her chest as if to steady its patter.

Twenty-two eggs, I know from reading, is a number well above the norm. During a non-medicalized menstrual cycle, a woman produces a single egg. Fertility drugs, in an attempt to increase one's odds at getting pregnant, typically stimulate a woman to produce six, ten, even fourteen eggs. But twenty-two! One's system literally falls apart; severe vomiting and pelvic pain landed our speaker in the emergency room.

"The good news," this thirty-year-old woman tells us, "is

that with all those eggs, the doctors fertilized and put on ice enough embryos for several more cycles."

She looks up at our listening faces, and then continues. "We went away Memorial Day weekend to a family reunion at my parents' house in the country. And, well, while everyone was nice and everything, it was really hard. My sister was there with her two small kids and, well, I cried every night." She wipes her cheek with her hand, brushing away new tears.

"I know what you mean," says the woman beside her, a small woman with black hair. "In the condo association where we live, there's a lot of social events. Pool parties, this time of year. And we don't go anymore because it's too upsetting—everyone else has kids. In the condo directory, we're the only ones without kids listed under our name."

Several heads around the circle nod sympathetically. I am not one of them. To me, it suddenly seems these women are crying less about being without child than about suddenly finding themselves the Other, different from everyone else they know. As a writer, as one who has lived on marginal income for many years, as one who married later in life, and, I might add, as a Jew, I have a fair experience with being an outsider. I'm accustomed to the unique view my Otherness allows. Again and again in this meeting, I hear these women—all of whom have good jobs, large houses, understanding husbands, and new cars—sob for part of their American dream denied.

It's ironic—one of the most stressful things that can happen in a support group for infertile women is for one of them to become pregnant.

And yet, isn't this also a most human dream denied? Perhaps I—a freelance writer with a small house and an old car—am the defensive accuser in this group. Who am I to judge another's pain? In the Bible, Rachel's distress is augmented by intense jealousy for her sister and co-wife, Leah, who births four sons in rapid succession. Sarah, childless wife of Abraham, develops a hatred for her maid Hagar, with whom Abraham has a son, Ishmael. To those of us who are having difficulty conceiving, all pregnant women are Leahs and Hagars.

Somehow, it feels easier to empathize with the despair of unanswered prayers and wombs that will not open in Canaan than it does to empathize with feeling excluded at pool parties and vacation homes. In Genesis, having children is about peopling a nation rather than peopling a Volvo. Children are necessary to establish lineage, and most important, conception and birth are integral to one's relationship with God. Those who are barren and troubled have a deep and aching dialogue with Yahweh. The children they finally conceive are signs that God hears and remembers; the births are profound events in the universe. Today, medical science diminishes the spiritual and cosmic dimensions of childbearing, and renders the "magic" of conception a matter of statistics and procedures. Even if biblical women did nothing but scream and wail at God for denying them children, I think we are all the poorer for having lost connection to that larger existence. At whom do we scream today? Spouse? Doctor? Our reproductive systems? These angers seem misguided.

"Okay," says the dark-haired woman sitting across from me. She takes a deep breath and grips her wrist with her hand. "We've been married for six years. The first year, we were careless with birth control, but not really trying. The second year, we stopped using anything. Nothing happened. I started keeping track of my temperature. Nothing. I talked to my ob/gyn and she put me on Clomid. Still nothing. They did the whole infertility workup on me and my husband and didn't find anything, so we kept trying. Finally, I don't know how, but I got pregnant." She shifts her weight in the chair. "I miscarried at eight weeks."

"Since then," she went on in a flat tone, "since then it's been more Clomid, artificial inseminations, and two more miscarriages. I just don't know when it's going to end."

"Can I speak?" says a woman sitting on the leather couch. We are supposed to be going around the circle, each one telling her story to the rest of the group, and she is out of turn. "I have to speak." But instead of speaking, she begins to cry: large, blubbering tears that turn her face red and blotchy. The rest of us wait, heads down, our gaze steady on the red Kilim rug.

"Today," she finally says between sobs, "today is the anniversary of Jeremy's death." More crying—silent heaving. "You're all invited to the unveiling over his tombstone this Sunday. I mean, we had a funeral and everything." Although no one moves or responds, this seems to quell her for the time being.

"I'm 43," she continues. "About two years ago, I met this man and we got married. We didn't know if I was too old to have kids so we got started right away and I got pregnant." This fact amazes her. "I got pregnant right off. We bought a house. We decorated one room as a nursery. Our friends threw us baby showers and I had an amnio so we knew we were having a boy and we picked out his name: Jeremy. His name is Jeremy."

She breaks down again and the woman sitting beside her puts a hand on her shoulder. "He was stillborn."

Inside me, I feel horror and disgust battling for attention. Horror for the stillborn tragedy, which in truth, makes me recoil for fear it could someday happen to me, and disgust for

this woman's flagrant display of her own troubles. Why am I unmoved by her grief? Perhaps I am too threatened, and need to distance myself.

But I saw how determined she was, even before the meeting began, to dominate the group. She interrupted people clear across the room; she spoke louder than anyone else; she took up half the couch. I disliked her immediately. And now I feel manipulated to feel empathy for her. I stare conspicuously at the rather large pimple on her nose. Clearly, she has won the group's hard-luck prize. I look at my watch. All right, I think, she's entitled to deep and extensive grief, mourning, outrage—but not here, not now. The meeting is to run for two hours and already this woman has taken up nearly half an hour. Even tragedy has its etiquette.

"Now," Jeremy's mother continues, "I'm going through my third and last IVF cycle." (IVF is the acronym for in vitro fertilization.) The way this woman says it lets me know she does not have time or patience to spell out lengthy medical terms. "This is it," she says. "Because of my age, I went straight to IVF. So far, my eggs haven't been very good quality."

AND HUGGED THE NARROW LEDGE. BY GRACE BANET WAPNER. COURTESY OF STEINBAUM KRAUSS GALLERY

My throat is tight, my stomach queasy. I came to this group to ease my own troubles. In a month or so, I will undergo a first in vitro fertilization cycle. I am 39 and doubtful about my own chances of becoming pregnant, fearful of shots and anxious about hormonal mood swings. Five years ago my husband was treated with radiation for prostate cancer. The radiation killed the cancer but rendered him sterile—we are trying to get pregnant with a non-renewable supply of banked sperm. And though the cancer has been in remission, it remains a threat always hovering on the periphery of our lives.

But tonight, in comparison to this woman's stillborn tragedy, my plight feels lesser, inconsequential.

Nor do I have room tonight in my small heart for the enormously difficult stories that follow. For as the circle picks up the order of our telling, I hear about ovaries that burst, tubes that broke, fast-growing fibroids. One woman, who drove down from New Hampshire, where insurance offers no coverage, sold her house to finance what has so far been only failed infertility treatments. Another woman hemorrhaged for a hundred days. Every imaginable mishap that the books say occurs to only a small percentage of women appeared to have happened to someone in the room. This is not a group to which I want to belong. Nor is it a particularly good match. I am at the beginning of my infertility career and many of these women are getting ready to retire.

I think again of Sarah. When she hears the prophecy that she will have a son within a year, she begins to laugh. Why shouldn't she? She is 90 years old and the biblical writers note that her periods have long stopped. Almighty Yahweh is displeased at Sarah's laugh, and accuses her of doubting his powers. But I am enormously glad for that laughter. It tells me that Sarah traveled so far in her grief that she no longer has any use for it. She has become a wise old crone who can laugh at herself. For it is modern, that laugh, full of female rebellion and existential doubt. Laughing at the preposterous, she exercises an outsider's freedom. She laughs with joy—at the age of 91 she gives birth to Isaac.

Tonight, in this meeting, there is no humor that might support us. No one rises above her misfortunes, even for a moment, to joke about enslavement to our wombs or these intricate out-of-the-body odysseys to get egg and sperm to join. No one mentions adoption.

As the session draws to an end, the social worker explains the rules about announcing a pregnancy. If it happens, we are supposed to call her before the weekly meeting, and she in turn will call the group members so as to give each person the chance to respond to the news in private. I understand about being sensitive to the feelings of others, and have myself felt envious or depressed hearing about so-and-so's pregnancy status, but it strikes me as absurd and ironic that one of the more stressful things that can happen among a group of infertile women is for someone to become pregnant. In this room that's thick with grief, I think of Sarah and decide to try a small laugh. The other women turn to me with faces long and lined; I hear my laughter ricochet raucous and ill-timed off the fresh painted walls.

Perhaps what unsettles me most profoundly about the infertility support group is that children—the object of so much heightened emotion—have been avoided as a painful topic. Instead, greater and greater misfortunes are embraced as the status quo. How does one grieve, I wonder, without losing touch with the joys that life still offers?

Outside this elegantly furnished living room waits a summer evening so temperate the air feels like a kindlier second skin. I want to be touched by that air. I want that air between my breasts, close to where the milk could be. ■

This article will appear in The Pregnancy Project: Encounters with Reproductive Therapy, *forthcoming from Duquesne University Press's Emerging Writers in Creative Non-Fiction series.*

King Solomon's **Knife**

A Midrash about Adoption

by Diane Cole

If I followed only the news reports, I'd be terribly confused about adoption. One morning I wake to applause: children's advocates and social agencies are cheering President Clinton's embrace of legislation that will ease legal obstacles to adoption.

A few days later, though, the climate seems to darken with a front page headline that blares, "Hands Off Our Babies, a Georgian Tells America." In a categorical condemnation of international adoption, Nanuli Shevardnaze, the wife of Georgian Republic President Eduard Shevardnaze, declares "Our nation's gene pool is being depleted." And if the children don't find homes in their country of origin? "All the Georgian people are suffering hardships," The New York Times quotes her as saying. "Let our children suffer, too."

FROM AN INDETERMINATE HEIGHT BY GRACE BAKST WAPNER. COURTESY OF STEINBAUM KRAUSS GALLERY.

That same day, in the letters column of another publication, I come across a chillingly similar argument, that it would be better for a child not to be born than to be adopted and raised by non-biological parents.

Do you hear the same echo I do, of generals declaring that in order to save the village we must destroy it? To clear my head of this refrain, I open a popular women's magazine only to discover a feature story that revisits a heartrending custody battle pitting adoptive parents and biological parents against each other. Eventually, "Baby Richard," as court papers call him, is wrenched from the adoptive family that has reared him from the age of four days until the age of four years, and transferred to the legal custody of his biological mother and father. Although the biological parents evidently at first promise to allow visits from the adoptive parents, they in fact deny them.

And now the biological father who fought so many legal battles to claim his son separates from his wife, leaving the child with her. Not only does "Baby Richard" lose contact with his adoptive family; to judge by the large number of men who drift away from and often lose touch altogether with the offspring of ex-wives, he loses a third parent, too.

Flip through my file marked "Adoption," and you'll find an old-fashioned Chinese restaurant menu of opinion that invites you to choose from Column A (adoption is good), Column B (adoption is bad), or Column C (adoption is controversial and provocative). According to your taste, you can mix and match the following: a fractious court battle over whether or not gay couples have the legal right to adopt a child; a positive profile of the loving single mother who has adopted kids from around the world; the horrifying crime that happens to have been committed by a child who was adopted; a celebratory profile highlighting the fact that a particular computer genius was adopted, or that a popular actress is a devoted adoptive parent; a shocking news report that a well-known personage has been accused of molesting an adopted child; the curious coincidence of an adopted son and his biological father finding each other while working at the very same construction site.

With so many mixed messages assaulting us, how can we be anything but confused about adoption?

Still, as the mother of a delightful eight-year-old son whom my husband and I adopted from Korea when he was seven months old, I shake my head and wonder: Why does the choice to form a family by adoption incite so much passion, provocation, and titillation?

Perhaps it's only my own history, as someone who suffered two pregnancy losses and explored various infertility treatments before deciding to adopt, that has forced me not only to ask the question, but to confront the answer. It's that adoption dramatizes, as perhaps nothing else can, our deepest questions and concerns about how parents, children, and siblings become, and remain, connected to each other, as a family.

Are we tied together by blood, or do we bond to each other through mutual affection? Is the "real" parent the one linked by a genetic code, or the one who provides nurturance and care?

(The last time I checked, both kinds had to be real, not virtual.)

It's as if we remain caught in time—specifically, in the time of King Solomon who, in his wisdom, threatened to cut a baby in half as a means of determining the "real" mother among two women, each of whom claimed the child was hers. Both women had given birth, but only one child had lived, and one woman must mourn her loss while the other celebrates. Only the authentic mother, Solomon perceived, would nobly offer to save her child's life by yielding to the other woman the privilege of being a parent.

With a sharp blade held in the balance, the Solomonic test leaves no room for doubt or compromise; biology is parenthood. And so the adoption wars, from Solomon's day to our day, have been tinged not only by the argument of blood but by the threat of blood.

To me, though, this has always been a blatantly misogynistic tale which, in the Biblical telling of it, manages to celebrate the "good" biological mother only at the expense of demonizing the "bad" would-be adoptive mother. Even if you argue (as I did recently with a religious school teacher) that you could reverse roles, with the "real" mother quite plausibly being the adoptive mother, you would still be pitting woman against woman, one "type" of mother against another "class" of mother, moral exoneration against an implicit moral condemnation.

That, as I say, is the Solomonic version of the story. It's the interpretation that leads to Nanuli Shevardnaze's declaration that, "All the Georgian people are suffering hardships. Let our children suffer, too."

I TOOK THE PATH ALONG THE CLIFFS BY GRACE BAKST WAPNER. COURTESY OF STEINBAUM KRAUSS GALLERY

It's a punishing, divisive vision, an unworthy legacy of the supposedly wise King Solomon. And the only way to counter it, I'm convinced, is for the wise women of our day to transform this tale into a healing one.

Naturally, this version (told by women for women) would start long before the women got to the royal courtroom—then, as now, a place arrived at only when all attempts at reconciliation have passed.

Instead, why not begin with the real drama, at the birthing rooms themselves and the pallets upon which these women, sweaty and worn and yet also elated from the pain of their labor, lie and listen for the first cries of their first born children.

But only one woman hears the cry. From the other bed, silence.

Imagine the mother of that stillborn child. A child born still. A child who died even as he was being born. And a mother who has known the labor but not the pleasure of motherhood. Where is the solace for her empty arms? She turns and sees her neighbor suckling her newborn; her own milk-heavy breasts ache with the knowledge that for her there will be no release. She inwardly curses her neighbor and accuses God; rage and envy now replace the tender love she would have bestowed on her child. Madness seizes her, or rather a mad thought: she will seize the other woman's baby and claim it as her own. Every time the live baby gurgles, moans, burps—with her mother all the while dozing lightly beside her—the stillborn's mother is filled with new longing, new madness. Now, she thinks, now I'll switch the babies.

But as the one mother leans over the other, something inter-

Some Resources on Adoption

Jewish Children's Adoption Network
Stephen and Vicki Krausz
Post Office Box 16544
Denver, CO 80216
(303) 573-8113

Jewish Family Services
There are local chapters offering adoption services around the country. Please check your local phone book or call the Networking Adoption Program for regional information.

Stars of David, Jewish Adoption Network
Ilene Schwartz, national president
2 Wenonah Avenue
Rockaway, NJ 07866
(973) 627-7752
Susan Katz, national chapter coordinator
(800) STAR-349

Karen Rispoli
Licensed Clinical Social Worker; Founder, former coordinator, Adoption Resource Center for the Jewish Family Services of Southern Middlesex County
3186 Highway 27
Kendall Park, NJ 08824
(732) 297-0011 or (732) 940-6117

Networking Adoption Program
Jewish Child Care Association
Kathy Ann Brodsky, director
120 Wall St.
New York, NY 10005
(212) 303-4722

—Michele Kriegman

Non-Jewish Adopted Kids and Their Jewish Rights

- If the birth mother is Jewish, the child is considered Jewish. If the birth mother is Gentile, the child can be converted to Judaism.
- About conversion: Conservative and Orthodox rabbis tend to perform a two-step conversion with circumcision for boys and immersion in a *mikvah* for both boys and girls. Because the infant is too young to give informed consent, girls at age 12 and boys at age 13 can annul a conversion. By the same token, they can reconfirm it then, too, but through most of childhood theirs may be viewed as an "incomplete" conversion and they may see themselves as "incomplete" Jews. The Reform interpretation is that membership in the Jewish community nowadays is voluntary anyway so there is no point in a formal confirmation at the time of bar or bat mitzvah. The Reform Rabbi's Manual emphasizes the obligation of adoptive parents to provide substantive Jewish education after conversion so their child will have an attachment to the Jewish people.
- One discrimination between adopted and biological children involves the transmission of priestly status. Being a *Kohen* or *Levi* (which often means no more than who is accorded which synagogue honors at a worship service) is transmitted exclusively through the birth father. Even if an adopted child is raised by *Kohen* or *Levi* parents, he does not inherit the right to recite the priestly blessing or other public privileges.
- All branches of Judaism, when a person's Hebrew name is recited, refer to the converted-adopted child as *"ben/bat* adoptive parent's name" in keeping with the ideal that an adoptee be treated as the child of his parents, rather than using the terms *"ben Avraham"* (son of Abraham) or *"bat Sarah"* (daughter of Sarah) that are usually used by converts.
- Judaism is not supposed to discriminate between children who join the community by birth and those who join by adoption and conversion. This view is based on Moses' relationship with his adoptive mother (Pharaoh's daughter), and between Naomi and her grandchild by Ruth. The Talmud concludes that "whoever rears an orphan in his house is considered as if he had begotten that child."

—Michele Kriegman

esting happens. The newborn's mother opens her eyes; she has not been sleeping at all. The two women lock glances, and each one sees in the other not an enemy but a reflection of her own dreams and her own fears. Haltingly, they begin to talk.

It turns out that the newborn girl's mother isn't married; her parents have thrown her out; she has no means to care for herself or her child; she does not know what to do.

Nor, at first, does the stillborn's mother. Why should she care about this other woman's dilemma when her own heart is so bitter and empty? She even begins to tell her this, when a sudden thought stops her cold. Didn't they share the pain of childbirth? Didn't they also share a sense of loss—one the death of her child, the other the death of a dream in terms of how she will raise her child. Would it be possible that they could in some way share the responsibility of bringing up that child? Through adoption? An "open" adoption, in which secrets about the child's biological heritage would not be maintained but contact with both sets of parents would. Couldn't they both share in the love of this little child, so that both mothers could proudly agree that each one was as "real" a mother as the other?

To whom does a child ultimately "belong" anyway, except to herself or himself? Emotion should bind us to our children, not blind us with narcissistic, self-reflecting images of ourselves. The more caring adults there are to love a baby, the more secure she'll feel; the fewer adults there are fighting over her, threatening literally—as well as figuratively—to cut her in two with the sword of Solomon, the more rooted and secure she'll also feel.

Surely, if we can decide on this in principle, the mothers say to each other, surely the details will work themselves out. Solomon's sword will be stayed. We cannot resurrect the dead child (or all the unborn children of women unable through infertility or other reasons to give birth), but let us focus on the living. That baby will continue to live, even thrive. And so will both mothers thrive, for they will be bound together by this baby's future instead of being torn by mutual anger into a dysfunctional family of enemies.

And thus is born a wonderful new parable. About adoption, yes. But beyond that, about how all families come into being: possibly but not necessarily by blood; yet always of the heart's necessity, through a sense of mutual connectedness and care. For all the families to which we come to belong in life—biological, adoptive, through marriage, love, friendship, work, collegiality, community, and more—enrich our lives with our sense of who we are, can be, or wish to be.

Clearly, it's long past time to retire the Sword of Solomon. From the start, it was too blunt an instrument, cutting into two our future and thus the past and present we all must share. How we replace this sword is up to us. If swords can indeed become ploughshares, then surely out of our confusion can come the healing and connection that all families need—however they come into being. ■

Diane Cole's most recent book is a memoir, After Great Pain: A New Life Emerges.

Adoption
An Adoptee Speaks

Jewish **Adoption**

The Obstacles Aren't What You Think. Plus...Some Jewish Solutions.

by Michele Kriegman

My neighbor recently returned from Romania with her newly adopted daughter. Amidst all the joy of baby-naming (they kept the toddler's Romanian name as a middle name and gave her a new first name), Margo* could not help complaining bitterly that she'd had to wait nine months for paperwork to be completed, including a home study and background check, and that the adoption itself cost nearly $10,000. Margo's ambivalent crankiness is not uncommon. It might have been useful for her to keep in mind that the best interests of her child were being served by a thorough background check, and that even with no fertility problems, conception takes three to six months, on average. Add in a nine-month pregnancy and that brings to 15 months the time biological parents have to wait. And prenatal care plus hospital bills for an uncomplicated delivery just about match the cost of an adoption.

I COULD FEEL THE CURRENT BENEATH MY FEET BY GRACE BANST WARNER. COURTESY OF STEINBAUM KRAUSS GALLERY.

No due date

The difference for Margo is that she and many other adopters have already paid a king's ransom for failed attempts at such state-of-the-art fertility treatments as in vitro fertilization. Medical insurance rarely covers either these treatments or the adoption itself. The adoptive families have also been enduring—sometimes for years—a monthly emotional roller coaster of rising hopes for parenthood, followed by dashed dreams.

During the adoption process, prospective parents live with the strain of an uncertain wait. A lot of them describe the wait as stretching out without a clear end in sight, sometimes until the last couple of days. Unlike a pregnancy, adoptions do not come with a due date.

Add to these tensions the fact that close to 50% of birth mothers change their minds and either keep the baby or have a relative become guardian, according to Karen Rispoli, former coordinator of adoption services at Jewish Family Services in New Brunswick, New Jersey. She explains that while some attorneys hedge on figures or artificially deflate that figure to only 25%, she prefers to prepare prospective parents by being honest from the outset. She encourages parents to "expect at least one set of plans to fall through, and remember that it's not a dead end; you will find a child."

Ilene Schwartz, an adoptive mother of two and one of the national board members of Stars of David, a Jewish adoptive parents support network, agrees. "Most couples who stick with it do find a child. It may not be the child they planned on originally, but it turns out to be the child they love."

Nevertheless, the whole infertility-then-adoption ordeal can leave adopters in what Joyce Pavao, director of a Massachusetts adoption agency and herself an adoptee, calls "a very fragile, needy state." She admits that "it becomes easy for adopters and for their social workers to focus on their needs to the exclusion of anyone else's."

Jewish Adoption Ethics

I guess this is where I had better lay all my cards on the table. I am an adoptee, not an adoptive parent. I am the mother of three biological children, but I endured an achingly long four-year wait between the birth of my first and second daughters. Because of that time, I can imagine, at least in part, some of what adoptive parents go through. Nevertheless, I think there are some inaccurate interpretations of the adoption data and unrealistic expectations about the time and money investments of adoption. Inaccurate figures have made would-be parents so fearful of never finding a baby that they complete-

**Names marked with an asterisk are pseudonyms.*

ly ignore "the best interest of the child" as long as they can buy a baby faster, cheaper and newer.

When I recently interviewed prospective adoptive parents about what they consider ethical behavior in an adoption, they focused typically on how others treated *them*: on whether the attorney charged a fair fee and made sure the birth father had agreed to the adoption (so he wouldn't create complications later), on whether the birth mother changed her mind or not, on whether a foreign government or agency expedited their case quickly or not. Certainly these demands would parallel fair business practices in any exchange of goods or activities for payment. But adoption is not just any business exchange. It is holy enough, and complicated enough, that there should be a body of *halakhah* advising adoption facilitators, the adoptee, the birth parents and the adoptive parents on how they should treat each other.

As one of the five thousand babies adopted in the state of New Jersey in 1963, I know first hand how important it is to safeguard "the best interests of the child."

In my case, my birth mother, who is a Jew, contacted me five years ago through the private adoption agency that had placed me with my parents as an infant. She says the agency assured her that I had been placed with an observant Jewish family. Instead I was placed with an unaffiliated interfaith couple. I love my parents very much, but I wish I had had more information about my background (my Jewish background, my medical background and my family background) before this. I have it now, through my own slow "return" to the Judaism I never knew, and through conversations with my birth parents. (I met my biological father two years ago.)

THOUGH THERE ARE UNEXPECTED OUTCROPPINGS BY GRACE BAKST WAPNER. COURTESY OF STEINBAUM KRAUSS GALLERY

Dr. Randy Severson, agency psychologist and administrator at the Cradle of Hope Agency in Texas for 12 years, has counseled thousands of prospective parents and tens of thousands of people individually or in groups who have been touched by adoption. He says, "I've never worked with a prospective couple that didn't find a baby if they really wanted to. Begin with that. The child is already born in your heart, so despite your desperation, begin even during the adoption process to act as an advocate for your child. Your ethical responsibility is to be a force for good. The two main ways you can manifest that are, first, don't let your child be treated as a commodity, even if you feel it speeds up the adoption process; second, don't cut your child off from other people who love him or her, don't pit yourself against the birth family, because as the advocate of your child you want your child to have access to his or her cultural history."

You might ask, "Will the child know the difference if the adoption story she/he is told is the true one?" No, but in adulthood they may. For example, in Scotland, where adoption records have been open since 1938, over 20% of adult adoptees have chosen to search for their biological parents. But elsewhere, under the conditions of independent adoption, recording and preserving an adoptee's original birth certificate (with the biological parent's name on it), and an accurate family and medical history, are much more difficult.

Advocacy implies concrete actions like asking questions about where your money goes and where the baby comes from. Make sure that the birth mother in a private adoption gets real counseling, not just bullying from your lawyer, so that her decision is the result of genuine informed consent. Gail*, an adoption counselor for New Jersey's Children's Aid and Adoption Services, reports getting an urgent message from a newly delivered birth mother at Glover* General Hospital. An adoption attorney had elicited from someone on the hospital staff the names of all the single mothers on the maternity floor, and he was visiting them unannounced and uninvited with briefcase in hand. He was "counseling" them to give up their babies because they "wouldn't be able to handle it out there alone."

Adult adoptees' rights groups representing birth mothers are battling state-by-state with the Academy of Adoption Attorneys over this. They feel the Academy is essentially fighting to open new business markets, and that adoption attorneys face a conflict of interest such that they cannot provide impartial counseling to birth mothers when it may jeopardize the adoption—which for the attorney is a potential source of income.

If you are an adoptive parent and you make promises to a birth mother, keep them, whether they are big things like maintaining an open adoption or "small" things like sending annual pictures of the child she gave you. (Who knows—with growing sophistication in DNA-typing or some other kind of technology it may be possible in the future for any adopted person to find his or her birth mother anywhere and to hear the birth mother's version of the adoption procedures; you do not want to do anything now that could come back to haunt you.)

Kathy Marangos, an adoption attorney in New Jersey and an adoptee herself, suggests, "Think long and hard about your motivation before changing an older child's first name, and make sure you have their genuine agreement."

"Gather as much medical and family information as you

can, even in an overseas adoption," suggests Jane Nast, an adoptive mother of two and the legislative director of the American Adoption Congress in Washington, D.C. "Please, don't think it's not important, because you can't predict the future. Gather what you can now so you can provide in the best interests of your child."

Jewish children need homes

This leads me to the most astonishing news you are likely to hear amidst the swirl of adoption facts and figures: most adoptable Jewish children and infants do not find Jewish homes, according to Stephen Krausz, co-founder with his wife, Vicki, of the Colorado-based Jewish Children's Adoption Network (JCAN).

"At adoption conferences we often have Christian parents come up to us and introduce their cute Jewish child and say, 'Look, he was Jewish.' Unless a Jewish birth mother becomes proactive by deciding to use a Jewish agency or to choose the adoptive parents of her child through private adoption, a child who is born Jewish and placed for adoption is not guaranteed a Jewish home. It is simply not a top priority for social workers at non-Jewish adoption agencies. The Jewish community has not created the kind of pressure that the African-American community has through the Organization of Black Social Workers or that the American Indian Nations have through passage of the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 to ensure that black and tribal children remain within their communities when possible."

One persistent statistic that has been recycled over and over in the Jewish press (and it is always unattributed) is that for every adoptable infant there are 40 waiting couples. Tom Kaplan*, an adoptive father of two pre-schoolers, puts the figure "40 waiting couples" into better perspective when he explains that he and his wife "must have put our names on over 30 agency waiting lists before we found our kids, so, yeah, you may have 40 couples on a list for each baby but I can guarantee you that none of those couples is on just one list."

The Krauszes suspect that the small size and interconnectedness of the Jewish community may actually work to its disadvantage when it comes to adoption: Jewish birth mothers who want to safeguard their own privacy may hesitate to go to a Jewish agency where they may be known. In fact most of the Jewish children that are referred by agencies to the JCAN are referred by non-Jewish agencies. Stephen Krausz believes that Jewish agencies have not sought out Jewish children actively enough. When he contacted New Jersey's Division of Youth and Family Services, for example, to try and convince them to consider a child's Jewish heritage in determining placement, he was told, "We have no Jewish children." He wondered how that could be. In Colorado, which only has one-eighth the Jewish population of New Jersey, he finds at least ten adoptable Jewish children a year. "Shouldn't there be 180 Jewish children a year available in New Jersey alone?"

The majority of the "healthy" children that are listed by the Jewish Children's Adoption Network are bi-racial Jews. They are more likely than white babies to be placed for adoption by their Jewish birth families and, at the same time, less likely to be adopted by other Jews, according to the Krauszes. Yes, the Jewish community is guilty of that ecumenical bogeyman: racism.

> Parents who adopt transracially should think of themselves as a multi-racial family rather than as a white couple with non-white children.

Racism and Jewish diversity

Obviously, a community's racism affects any non-Caucasian adopted child whether she is a Jew by birth or by conversion. One rule of thumb that JFS has suggested is that if you find a congregation that is welcoming to Jews-by-choice and interfaith couples, you will have found one that holds more enlightened views on adoptions, including transracial ones. Karen Rispoli, whose ten-year old daughter is from Korea, chose to affiliate with a congregation where "she wouldn't have to choose between identities as a Korean-American-Jewish-adoptee."

Dr. Howard Altstein, a professor of social work at the University of Maryland, is currently beginning a survey of transracial adoptions in the Jewish community and believes that Jewish parents, being a minority themselves, may be able to bring extra sensitivity to handling the needs of adopted children whose race makes them a minority in the U.S.

A suggestion adoption counselors make to all parents who adopt transracially is that they should think of themselves as a "multi-racial" family. It's a subtle but important distinction from thinking of yourself as a white couple with non-white children. If you begin to think of yourself as part of a multi-racial unit you are more likely to buy a house in an integrated neighborhood and have family friends of various backgrounds, all of which will be easier on your child.

Jewish educators act in the best interests of the child when they also emphasize that the family called the Jewish people is in fact "multi-racial." In other words, stress that Judaism is a religion, not a race, and *kehillot*, Jewish communities, come

in many colors, including black Jews from Ethiopia and African-Americans who have chosen Judaism.

Other folk cultures have always enriched the celebration of Judaism, and your child's birth heritage can help do that, too. For example, the harvest festival of China, Korea and Vietnam, which is called the Mid-autumn Festival, coincides with the Jewish Festival of Sukkoth two years out of every three (because both are based on similar lunar calendars). That makes it a natural opportunity to include the sweet mooncakes and storytelling of an East Asian adoptee's heritage as part of your Sukkoth celebration. There are books that survey the Jewish history of almost every country of the world, including China and India, and these may help adoptive parents meld their child's birth culture with their own.

Jewish Adoption Rituals

There are Jewish rituals that recognize and welcome adoption itself as a part of the life cycle. Jewish tradition already has blessings to celebrate new occasions, circumcisions, and conversions. The Reform movement's *Gates of Mitzvah* includes services similar to baby-namings that are designed to honor the adoption either of an infant or an older child. Many new parents choose to expand and personalize their ceremony, using lines from the Talmud that validate adoptive parenthood or Psalm 80, which gave us the modern Hebrew word for adoption, *ametz*. The original meaning was "to graft or to strengthen," which suggests a very organic image of adoption.

TRACES OF MANGANESE AND OCHRE BY GRACE BAKST WAPNER COURTESY OF STEINBAUM KRAUSS GALLERY.

But Jewish tradition does not cover all the life cycle events involved in adoption. Bobbie and Laurie Baron created a special service "for accepting the loss of our dream of having a biological child" (in Rabbi Debra Orenstein's anthology, *Lifecycles, Volume 1*). It closes with a *havdalah* ceremony that separates the dark time of their focusing on infertility treatments to the light time in the future in which they may either choose to remain childless, but still a family, or to adopt.

Reunion between birth parents and adult adoptees has not commonly been marked by ritual. For the past three years, a group of several dozen adoptive parents, birth parents and adult adoptees have celebrated an "adoption seder" I wrote with guidance from Rabbi Donald Rossoff of Temple B'nai Or in Morristown, New Jersey. It draws on the lifelong relationship between Moses and his adoptive Egyptian mother, who chose to join his Hebrew birth family when the Children of Israel crossed the Red Sea and left Egypt.

One of the "four questions" we ask at the adoption seder is: "Why is it that the adoptive mother of Moses chose to follow her adopted son?" The answer I give is found in Deuteronomy (10:16 and 30:6). These passages contrast Moses to Abraham. Where Abraham bound the Jewish community through the blood-tie of circumcision, Moses the Adopteee taught the Israelites a new kind of bond, literally "circumcision"—or more poetically, "opening"—of the heart. Moses and his Egyptian mother were not bound by blood but by a mutual opening of the heart. The Jewish community may need to re-experience an "opening of the heart" for the largest group of Jewish children who are waiting to be adopted. These children have been labeled "special needs."

Of the "special needs" children listed by JCAN, about a third have "emotional problems" like attachment disorder and are older, or have suffered neglect or abuse. Another 25%-30% of the "special needs" children have Down syndrome. The remaining third tend to be newborns with birth defects ranging from cystic fibrosis to something more minor like cleft palate or club foot.

JCAN gets about 1,000 phone inquiries a year, but only 20% of their application forms are returned to them, because JCAN explains up front in their literature that over 85% of the Jewish children they help are "special needs." The label alone scares away most adopters. Krausz argues that many of the children Jews adopt from overseas have the same "special needs" as these Jewish children but that these just have not yet been diagnosed.

That view was elaborated on by Elsa Weinstein, a pre-adoption workshop organizer for British Columbia's Ministry of Family and Children, and the mother of one adopted son and one biological son, who said, "Overseas they're just as likely to have attachment disorders or fetal alcohol syndrome, but because the kids don't have a [recorded] history, it's easier for prospective parents to fantasize." ■

Michele Kriegman is a freelance writer at work on a book called Orphans, Adoptees & Test-Tube Babies.

For more information about how to purchase a copy of Michele Kriegman's Adoption Haggadah, please contact LILITH by phone at (212) 757-0818, by fax at (212) 757-5705 or by e-mail at lilithmag@aol.com.

Fertility
By Any Means

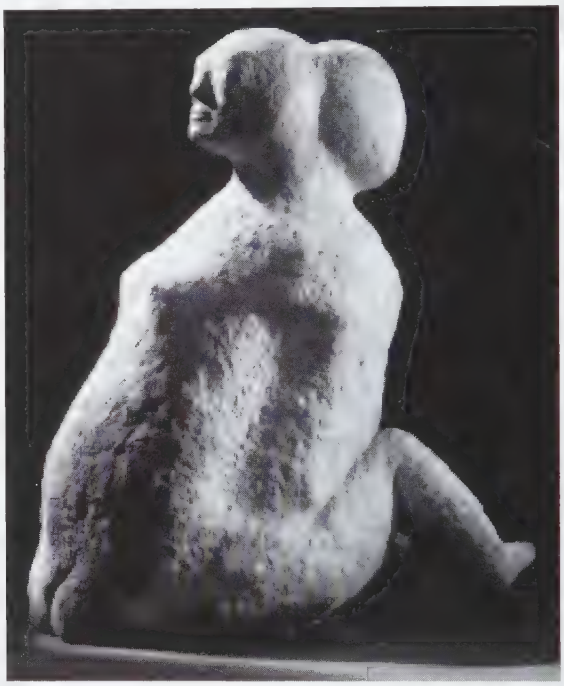
Putting Jewish **Wombs to Work**

Israelis Confront New Reproductive Technologies

by Susan Martha Kahn

The new reproductive technologies have been enthusiastically embraced in Israel, a country where the imperative to reproduce has deep religious, historical, political and cultural roots. This embrace extends from the Israeli biomedical community, which is on the cutting edge of research and development of these technologies, to the Israeli rabbinic world, where serious efforts have been made to allow for their use, to Israelis themselves, who have been eager and largely uncritical consumers of these technologies. So it's no surprise, then, to learn that *there are more fertility clinics per capita in Israel than in any other country in the world.* It's not that Israelis are infertile at greater rates, but that infertility is understood to be a grave affliction that must be treated by any means necessary.

The attractiveness of these technological "solutions" to infertility obviously gives rise to lots of questions.



AS SOON AS I COULD. BY GRACE BAKST WAPNER. COURTESY OF STEINBAUM KRAUSS GALLERY.

■ Is surrogacy legal in Israel?

Yes. In 1996, the Knesset passed the Embryo-Carrying Agreements Law, making Israel the first country in the world where surrogacy contracts are publicly legislated by a government-appointed commission. The Embryo Law stipulates four main conditions for surrogacy: 1) All applications for surrogacy agreements must be approved on a case by case basis by a public/professional committee. Government involvement is intended to ensure that surrogacy agreements are not brokered by private agents who may seek to exploit either party. 2) The surrogate and the contracting couple must come from the same religion. 3) The sperm used to conceive the child must come from the husband of the contracting couple and the egg must come either from the wife of the contracting couple or from an unrelated donor; in other words, neither the surrogate mother's own genetic material nor genetic material from any of her kin may be part of the conception. 4) Every effort must be made to find a surrogate who is an unmarried woman, either single, divorced, or widowed. These conditions were designed to limit potential ethical and *halakhic* problems about the status of children conceived and born as the result of these agreements.

■ Why must the surrogate be of the same religion as the contracting couple?

Condition #2 is a concession to a very specific rabbinic concern about the religious status of the child conceived under such an agreement. There is an ongoing rabbinic debate about whether genetics, gestation or parturition is the significant determinant of maternity; this question is obviously very important in Judaism, where identity is usually determined matrilineally. (When the mother is Jewish, the child is Jewish.) At present, the majority of Orthodox rabbinic decision-makers agree that the woman who gives birth to a child determines its religious identity.

Therefore, most rabbis rule that for these purposes the surrogate mother is considered to be the mother of the child. Thus a child conceived with the genetic material of a Jewish couple and born of a Jewish womb is considered to be Jewish. By contrast, if the embryo of a Jewish couple is gestated to parturition in a non-Jewish womb, the child is not considered to be Jewish. Hence the preference for Jewish surrogate mothers.

However, the new surrogacy legislation denies the surrogate mother parental rights over the child. This legislative sleight of hand was undoubtably orchestrated by secular lawmakers who wanted to appease the Orthodox rabbinical establishment's concern that the children born of such agreements should be kosher Jews while simultaneaously quieting the fears of contracting couples that the surrogate mother would unexpectedly claim custody of the child she gestated and gave birth to. The legislation, then, effectively ensures that not only is the surrogate's womb rented, the Jewishness of the surrogate's womb is rented as well.

Surrogacy: Opposing Views

Although Israeli law has given its official sanction, surrogacy is far from universally accepted within Israeli medical circles. Within the two hospitals run by Hadassah Medical Organization in Israel, for example, divergent policies reign, as was apparent from recent interviews conducted by Hadassah. "In my opinion, the risks to the physical and psychological health of the surrogate mother are too great for the procedure to be practiced," says Professor Neri Laufer, head of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the Hadassah-Hebrew University Medical Center on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem. His department refuses to facilitate surrogacy.

At Hadassah's higher-tech Ein Karem hospital across town, however, surrogacy has already been approved and practiced. "When surrogacy is rooted in the full and fully informed consent of all the involved parties and when they are fully prepared, psychologically, psychosocially and medically, I see it as an acceptable solution for couples who can't have a child by any other means," says Professor Aby Lewin, who is in charge of the In-Vitro Fertilization Unit at the hospital. He emphasizes the need to address the "psychological burden" placed on the surrogate.

■ **Why must the sperm come from the contracting couple while the egg must come from either the wife or an unrelated donor** (Condition #3)? **And why should a surrogate be unmarried?** (Condition #4)?

In order to understand Conditions #3 and #4, it is important to delineate how the concept of illegitimacy is constructed in rabbinic kinship cosmology, which differs from the concept of "bastardy" that adheres to a child born out of wedlock. In rabbinic thinking, a child born to an unmarried woman is not considered to be a bastard. Stigmatized status only devolves upon the child born from a sexual union which the rabbis define as either adulterous or incestuous; such child is called a *mamzer* and he or she is subject to a range of severe social stigmas that directly affect status in the Jewish community, and eligiblity for marriage to another Jew.

The new surrogacy law seeks to avoid creating "*mamzers*." Incestuous unions are prohibited by condition #3, that the surrogate and/or the ovum donor must be unrelated to the contracting couple. Condition #4 seeks to prohibit conception in "adulterous" unions by legislating that the surrogate must be unmarried, for adultery is defined as a sexual union that takes place between a Jewish man and a married Jewish woman who is not his wife; sex between a man (married or not) and an unmarried woman is not considered adulterous.

■ **How about *unmarried* women who want to conceive?**

Israeli health insurance, which mandates universal coverage for every citizen of Israel, Jew or Arab, subsidizes assisted conception for women regardless of marital status. An unmarried Israeli woman with fertility problems is eligible for up to seven rounds of in-vitro fertilization treatment up to the birth of two live children. In the United States, just one round of IVF treatment can cost from $5,000-$20,000. This legislation also means that unmarried women are eligible for artificial insemination with anonymous donor sperm at the state's expense. There is a small, but growing trend of unmarried Israeli women who are conceiving children in this manner.

Unmarried women's access to reproductive technology is equal to that of married women's in all spheres except two. Unmarried women are unable to contract with surrogates, and as the legislation stands at present, unmarried women are ineligible for ovum donations, though this regulation was successfully challenged in Israel's Supreme Court on the grounds that it was discriminatory.

■ **Who donates sperm?**

The majority of sperm in Israeli sperm banks is collected from Jewish college and graduate students who donate sperm for financial renumeration. All of the sperm in Israeli sperm banks is frozen and checked for AIDS and other diseases, and potential donors are required to fill out extensive medical histories. The matches between sperm donors and sperm recipients are made by fertility clinic personnel, and the anonymity of the donor is strictly safeguarded in legislation. Women may request the ethnicity of the sperm, e.g. Ashkenazi, Sephardi or Mizrachi, and may request a few phenotypic variables, like hair, skin and eye color. There is no sperm donor directory in Israel so there is no possibility of identifying sperm donors and the children conceived with their sperm.

■ **What about non-Jewish sperm donors in Israel?**

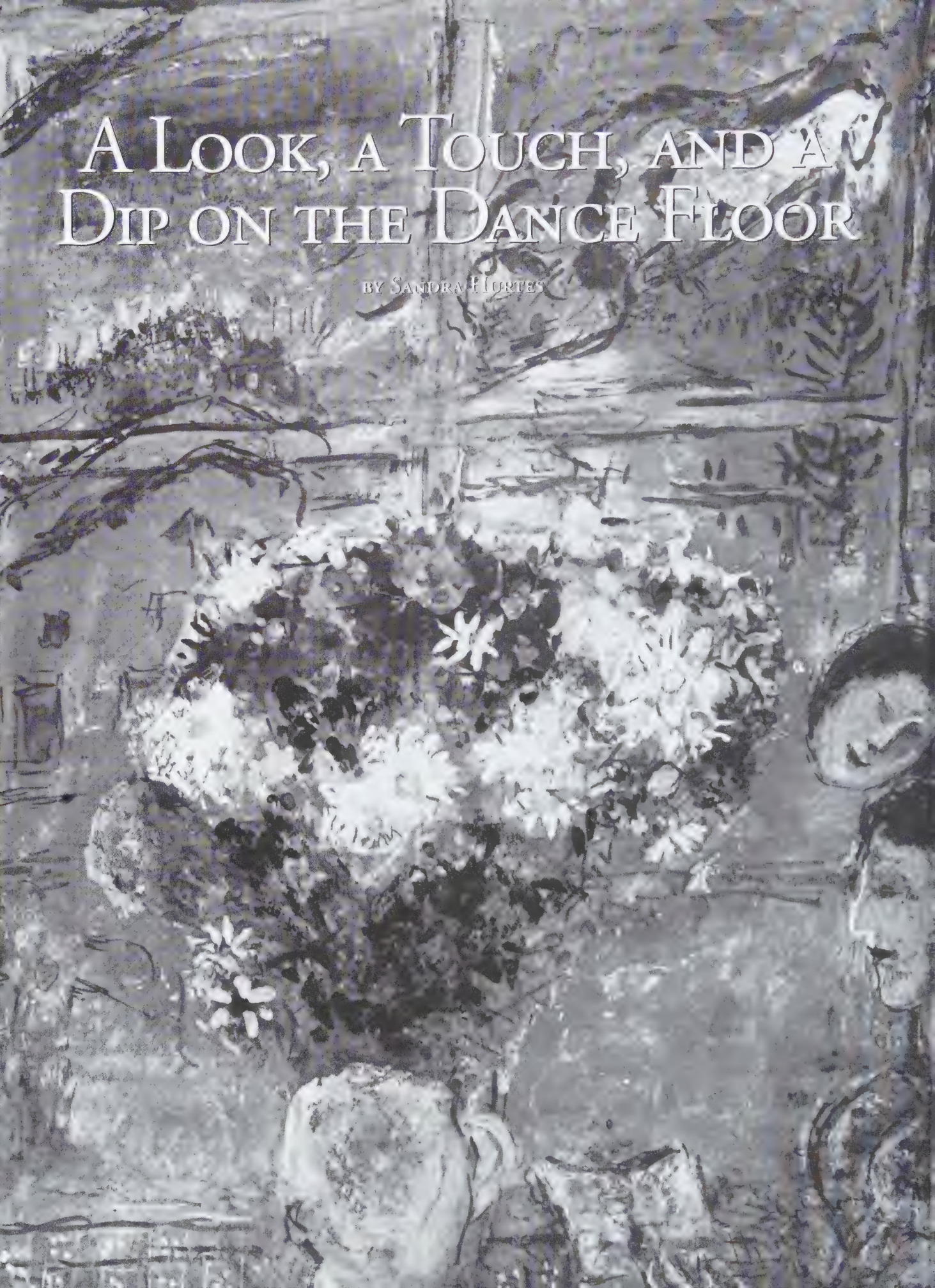
The market for non-Jewish donor sperm is not what you might think. Islamic law prohibits Muslims from using donor sperm when undergoing fertility treatment for male-factor infertility, but a significant market for non-Jewish sperm in Israel is found among certain sects of ultra-Orthodox Jews. Their rabbis argue that a child conceived with Jewish donor sperm could be considered a *mamzer*, since conception between Jewish donor sperm and the egg of a married Jewish woman could be parallel to adultry. These rabbis consider the child conceived with non-Jewish sperm to be a fully kosher Jews (since the mother's identity, remember, determines the Jewishness of the child).

The proliferation of new reproductive technologies in Israel is the result of an extrordinary convergence of law, medicine, and religion, a convergence that has at its center the pronatalist impulse to reproduce Jews by putting Jewish wombs to work. ■

Susan Martha Kahn is the Research Director of the International Research Institute on Jewish Women at Brandeis. Her book, Reproducing Jews: A Cultural Account of Assisted Conception in Israel, *is forthcoming from Duke University Press.*

A Look, a Touch, and a Dip on the Dance Floor

BY SANDRA HURTES



It had been a long time since I'd met anyone promising in the romantic arena, and I'd pretty much retired the dreams I'd carried since childhood about marriage and children. I'd been settling instead for a sprinkling of dates, here and there, taking what I could get, almost forgetting that I ever wanted more.

One night on a whim I took myself out to a popular Manhattan dance spot where the lights were dim, the music was loud, and the crowd was lively. I sat at a small table surveying the scene when I spotted someone interesting across the dance floor. He looked at me, then looked away, and finally, he held my glance. Before I knew it we were playing the mating and waiting game, until the braver one of us stepped across the great divide and asked, simply, "Would you like to dance?"

We found our way easily into each other's rhythm, and to the tune of "This Can't Be Love," we covered ground. As we dipped and twirled around the crowded dance floor, he whispered in my ear, "We have great dance compatibility." I heard in his words the hint of a future, and my cautious heart began to come out of hiding.

After dancing a few numbers we stopped to catch our breath, and over drinks we got acquainted. "Do you take lessons?" he asked. "No, but I'm thinking about it. Maybe West Coast Swing." It seemed like the right thing to say, as if I was in the know. He told me about a new club in Soho, one that he was hoping to try. Then he got down to business. Taking out his wallet he proudly showed me a picture of his son, "From an early marriage," he explained. He quickly added, "It's been over for years."

I told him I'd been married once, also long ago, and I had no children. Pushing a ringlet back from my forehead he asked me for my phone number. Then he wrote his own number on a scrap of paper, and his name in case I'd already forgotten. Richard.

We had our first date a week later. It was an easy evening with good conversation in a dark, crowded restaurant. Over shrimp curry and chicken tandoori, he told me about his good friend, Carol, whom he often went dancing with. She'd recently fallen in love, and he was hoping that would happen for him, too.

"I'd like to get married again and have at least one more child," he said as we walked outside, looking for a cab to send me home in. Standing on the corner not yet ready to part, I felt as if I was dreaming when he said he had told Carol about me. "Let's call her and tell her how our date's going," he said, smiling.

When I got home that night I thought about how unusual it was to be with someone who was that open about what he wanted and so eager to involve me in his life. His sincerity and lack of pretense were touching me in all the right ways, and by the end of our second date, my dusty old dreams for marriage and children were tumbling out of the closet.

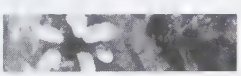
"It would be nice to have a big family," he told me on our third date, "because my parents died when I was so young." My overbearing family seemed heavenly to him. I thought about inviting him for Thanksgiving to show him what the other side was really like. But I held back.

After dinner we went for a walk, and then we stood in front of my apartment building for a long time before he kissed me. As we walked inside we made plans for our next date. Dancing, we both agreed, at the club in Soho. It had a small dance floor he'd heard. We'd have to go easy on the swirling. Bring it in a little closer.

The next day I thought about what I'd wear on our date and was looking forward to talking to Richard. I didn't hear from him for a few days though, and I thought it was a little odd, since we'd been speaking often. Finally I called him at work and left a message. A little impatient, I also left a message on his tape at home. A few days later, still nothing. I was trying hard to keep my mind from going where it wanted to go—he lost interest, I was too eager, he got scared and ran. I found out soon enough it was none of the above.

Three days after our last date, Richard died in his sleep. It wasn't a heart attack, an aneurysm, or anything discernible. The autopsy report that came back eight weeks later was inconclusive but confirmed that it was of natural causes. I received a phone call from Richard's friend, Carol, exactly a week after our last date. She'd searched his house for my phone number and found it finally on Richard's dresser. She was sorry she didn't get to me sooner, and no, there was nothing I could do. The funeral was already over, and so was *shiva*.

THE FEELINGS HE STIRRED IN ME SHOWED ME MY DESIRE FOR LOVE WASN'T DEAD, JUST BURIED.



We hung up, and I sat very still waiting to feel something deep and dark inside, something that would move me to cry bitter tears. But I felt nothing. No, I felt eerie. Why, I wondered, through the slow, steady shock that grew heavier not lighter as the days stretched into weeks. Why was I pulled in at the final hours to witness the end of a life I barely knew? What was the reason for us to meet?

Many months later I got my answer. I came home one evening from a date with a man I had started seeing. He was a divorced dad, not looking for a commitment, my usual scenario. As I reviewed my evening with this casual guy, I thought about how disappointed I was that he kept forgetting to show me pictures of his children, and that he had to cut our night short because there was just too much he had to do the next day. Oh, and about next week, well he didn't know yet if he'd be available. He'd call me.

There was nothing to hope for with this new man, no fantasies to get lost in. It was all pretty dim. That's when I understood why I had to meet Richard. The feelings he stirred in me showed me my desire for love wasn't dead, just buried, and the dreams of my childhood still lingered in anticipation that they might yet come true. No, Richard wasn't taken from me to leave me hungry and wanting. He was given to me to show me the kind of life in which I had stopped believing.

I like to think that there was something special Richard got from me that he took with him to his final sleep. Perhaps he, too, experienced the sweet rush of old dreams resurrected and the wonder of living again in long-forgotten hope. These exquisite treasures so many of us search for and never find. And maybe even worse, some of us no longer look. If that's true for you, then I'm here to tell you. Bringing a heart back to life can sometimes be so simple. For me it all started with a look, a touch, and a dip on the dance floor. ■

Sandra Hurtes is a freelance writer who lives in New York. This article originally appeared in The New York Times.

Rose of the Mediterranean

a short story by Nava Semel

translated by Barbara Harshav

Promises given are not to be taken lightly, my grandmother used to say, especially if they were made with great love, and I didn't understand back then who made the promise and who keeps it. And she also said: You always have to remember to say thank you, even for a small plum branch.

The words flow from her mouth like minnows and the kerchief tied on her head drips. Until the day she died she didn't take it off. A gray cloth that covered her scalp and her ears and didn't let a single mutinous wisp of hair out. I still wonder what color her hair was. Even at night, she didn't take it off.

Small modest movements, she commands, slow and easy, so it won't think, God forbid, that you came to rule it or to force yourself on it.

I slice the water, my terror bursts out of me. My hands are taut and I draw my arms in to my chest, and as I do, my fingers bump into the buttons of the shirt, how easy to pluck them off.

Under the rule of her eyes, I reluctantly outline circles. My feet are planted in pebbles and mud, but I don't slip, for her clasp is firm. She warns against the reefs, pushes my arms resolutely, like oars, ready for the oncoming wave. Don't forget, don't be swept away like a mindless thing, but obey the secret voice whispering from below.

We are surrounded by women bathing. A crowded assembly hopping in the water. They spray one another and shout gleefully like little girls granted a surprise vacation from school. Not even on the regular beach is there such a turmoil. A jumble of kerchiefs and scarves and caps and straw hats. Their heads like multicolored balls bob on the surface of the

water, all of them bathing in their clothes, buttoned up to the neck.

I'll teach you, declared my grandmother—more than a promise to me, it was a vow to herself—and she took me to the religious women's beach. No man crossed the sheet that formed the border. Only little boys before bar mitzvah. Their sidelocks immerse in the foam, and become even curlier.

How did my grandmother become an expert swimming teacher? Others have tried to teach me and every time that same paralyzing dread lands on me and I can't dive. The ridiculous long skirt clings to my calves, flaps against my heels as the wave assaults and drags me like a weight. And only my grandmother is light as foam. The waves swell her dress, and I keep from bursting into laughter, because she looks like an upside down flower on the surface of the water, and that's what her name means—little Rose. And despite the clothes that curb the movement of her body, nothing obstructs the bold rowing rhythm of her legs, or the clarity of her memory.

I remember asking, Why do we have to swim in the sea all dressed? Is God a man? And Grandmother laughed.

In 1919, a year after the end of World War I, Zelig-Haim Gutman returned from a Russian prison camp to the little village in the Marmuresh strip on the slopes of the Carpathian Mountains, on the banks of the River Tisa, and decided to take a wife. He had no money for a matchmaker, so he had to send his uncle Samuel to the home of Sender the Treasurer to ask for the hand of his oldest daughter Rayzel.

During the years Zelig-Haim was away, the village hadn't changed much. In the tavern, the drunkards still wallowed at dawn, waiting patiently for the door to open and imploring Mendel, the Jewish tavernkeeper, to give them a glass of brandy on credit, and Tsitsul the blacksmith would wet his whistle with three glasses at one gulp before he would fit even one horse's hoof. At the well, the women trudged with water buckets, and as they pulled on the rope they would exchange forbidden secrets from the most private rooms, and then they'd go back to gather wood for heating, and didn't guard their tongue even when they washed their laundry in the river. In the synagogue, seating arrangements were still the same, and Sender the Treasurer, owner of the big sawmill, sat in his regular place "in the East" and every other Sabbath, he had the honor of taking the Torah scroll from the Ark of the Covenant. The idlers, led by Itsele, still warmed themselves at the stove and groaned "oy vay, how hard life is," and even Mariana, the prostitute, still lived in a house next to the cemetery and covered her window during a funeral out of honor for the dead, even though he was often one of her clients.

Zelig-Haim Gutman yearned for someplace else. He had nothing in the world except for the uniform he wore when he returned home. After he was released from captivity, his feet bore him against his will to the place where he knew every clod of dirt but refused to call it "home." Skinny he was and short, his eyes flashed in a face like thousands of other faces. With neither family nor fortune, he had been raised by his uncle Samuel ever since his mother died in childbirth, and the name "Haim," Life, was added by his uncle when the boy was stricken with diphtheria at the age of six. After his miraculous recovery, the name remained, but the villagers kept complaining about his weakness and joked that any breeze would fly him back over the border. When he was conscripted into the Austrian army, they laughed and said that any legion Zelig-Haim served in would be routed immediately. Zelig-Haim was the only one who obeyed the conscription order. The others hid in the attic, used up all their money paying bribes and buying forged documents to shirk the draft, and his cousin even cut off a finger, inflicting an eternal defect, just to avoid the army. When it was learned that Zelig-Haim Gutman was captured, there were those who said that was the end of him, a weakling like that wouldn't hold out.

And yet Zelig-Haim surprised everyone and came back. In the three years of his captivity, under the white polar skies, he vowed to see Rayzel once more, the daughter of Sender the Treasurer, and ask her to marry him.

I miss my bathing suit. The one concealed under the clothes, and even though it's threadbare and faded, it's the one I wear at the regular beach, which is so close and so far, right here beyond the dividing sheet. Thin straps that leave a white imprint on my brown shoulders. My back burned by the penetrating sun, my thighs wrapped in salty dust. On the bus, I shrank onto the back seat, hiding behind the straw hat, so no one I knew would see me, God forbid, and discover that I was headed for the religious women's beach. With my hair plaited in two braids that Grandmother wove before we left and the long-sleeved dress coming down to my knees. The stockings I took off without her noticing. I remember asking, Why do we have to swim in the sea all dressed? Is God a man? And Grandmother laughed.

Dejected, Zelig-Haim's Uncle Samuel left the house of Sender the Treasurer. What nerve to ask for the hand of his oldest daughter, who had such a sharp mind, an expert in holy lore, who could debate a point in the Talmud like a scholar, and who also played all of Chopin's

sonatas without a mistake on the white piano he had purchased for an exorbitant price in the district town. Rayzel deserved a better match than that skinny, homeless pauper, who had no past and whose future was dubious. The Treasurer said, It will not take place, and he already had another bridegroom for his daughter, the son of well-to-do people from the big city of Budapest and the "terms" were almost arranged. And Sender the Treasurer didn't even look at his wife before he dismissed the uncle from the house. Samuel swore he wouldn't exchange a word with him until next Yom Kippur, then he would demand his forgiveness.

The whole time, Rayzel stood behind the door and eavesdropped, her wrath kindled. The truth is that she had almost forgotten about Zelig-Haim over the years, yet the memory of their accidental childhood encounter at one of the streams of the River Tisa wasn't washed away. Zelig-Haim was so shy that he seldom opened his mouth. A secret voice impelled her to address him. Does he know that this little river ultimately reaches the big sea at the end of the world, that's what they say.

I shrank onto the back seat so no one I knew would see me, God forbid, and discover that I was headed for the religious women's beach.

The thin lad looked at his reflection in the stream, dreaming so much about other places and people. Even though she was a little girl, Rayzel was graced with sharp senses and recognized the storms raging in him. With an inexplicable impulse, Zelig-Haim picked a branch off a plum tree, one of many planted on the slopes, stretched it happily over the water and promised that when he reached the place of his dreams, she will be there, too. And years later, she remembered his dark eyes ardent with conviction. If not for those eyes, she would have joined the mockers and dismissed his confused words as a childish lunacy.

For two days she waited and then she appeared before her father and informed him that Zelig-Haim—and no one else—would be her husband.

Since when does a woman make the decision? Sender the Treasurer raised his voice. A rebellious daughter he had raised. And yet, when she persisted in her disobedience, he tried flattery. How would that beggar support her, with his own hands Sender would condemn his eldest daughter to the disgrace of starvation. She would end her days like some village woman and would grow old before her time. At last, a plot ripened in his mind and he said that if Zelig-Haim proved he could buy a house, he would be willing to give him his daughter, and he laughed to himself. For such a thing would never happen. Back in the days of the hostile Empress Maria-Theresa, a decree was issued forbidding Jews to purchase land. They would lease a field or a plot from a Gentile, or they would cunningly ask a Christian to purchase it for them and would fill his pockets with bribes. Zelig-Haim would not have his own piece of land until the days of the Messiah, and thus Sender the Treasurer would release his daughter from the punishment of that impertinent leaf blown in the wind.

And don't fall into the trap of the whirlpool, Grandmother would warn. Its changing moods, gurgling like that, will tempt you with winning ripples, will intoxicate you with the light winding of its waves, but you have to watch out for its fury, because it isn't faithful like a man who really loves.

The day the Zionist agent visited the remote village, Zelig-Haim's hope of getting a house had just been disappointed. In despair, he had proposed to the Gentile Gregor to buy a wooden hut in his name; it was next to the cemetery, two windows away from the prostitute Mariana. In exchange for a gold button from his uniform. Every day Gregor raised the price, until there was almost nothing left on Zelig-Haim's uniform but buttonholes, and he still hadn't given him an answer. The Zionist agent sat in the doorway of the synagogue, a simple cloth bag on his back and his head swathed in a cloth strip that made him look like a shepherd from the Bible. A short while earlier, Gregor had informed Zelig-Haim that he wouldn't buy even a pigsty for the "Zhid."

Zelig-Haim stood apart from the group of gawking idlers who surrounded the agent, listening like them to his excited words about an English lord, his exalted majesty, who in his great mercy, granted the Jews a home in the Land of Israel.

There really is no such place, decreed Itzele, the doyen of the idlers, and was convinced that this was some lunatic who had escaped from an asylum. The Zionist pulled a bundle of papers out of his bag, thrust them under Itzele's nose, and rifled them furiously. Here, in big bold letters. A letter sent from Lord Balfour to the millionaire Rothschild.

A land of paper? Itzele's laughter thundered and all the idlers roared. The Zionist swore on his word of honor that he really was a representative of the company to redeem the lands, "Eternal Possession," and anybody who wants could buy a genuine estate from him, the same price for everyone.

Land for sale? Zelig-Haim Gutman's eyes lit up. Where is this wonder?

The Zionist declared, In Tel Aviv, the first Hebrew city, on

the golden sands, next to the sea as blue as a prayer shawl. Trams go from one end to the other and the buildings touch the sky, real towers of Babel, and in the city square a crystal fountain spits flames to the tunes of an orchestra. And on the tables of the lucky ones who have chosen to live there rise wonderful flavors, stuffed goose and fatted calves and biscuits in honey and fine fruits for dessert, and they even feast on roast Leviathan on the Sabbath and holidays. And gigantic ships anchor in the big port of the city and every day, Jews from all four corners of the world descend from their bowels, a medley of languages of the Twelve Lost Tribes, and they're even leaving America in droves just to win that blessed property, the first ones win.

Zelig-Haim snatched the paper, plucked all the remaining buttons off his uniform and made a down payment.

She swims away from me.

I'm alone, wipe the raindrops of the breakers off my face.

I was desperate. Learning to swim in clothes is a task doomed to failure from the start. I protested, What if I don't know how to swim, so what? Is swimming a commandment?

On the third day the sea was created. In moments of weakness, my grandmother tried to cheer me up with tales, so I'd forget the daunting task. The first water in the world sang to the Creator. And when the waters were condemned to be split underneath separate and above separate, the waters underneath burst into a lamentation of waves. Why, of all creatures, were they condemned to be far away from the Creator? They wanted to change the order of the creation.

Someone who is bold enough to turn the world upside down will finally succeed. You mustn't give up, said Grandmother, and didn't let me go back to the beach.

Zelig-Haim Gutman himself went to Sender's house, with the bill of sale in his hand. He put it on the Treasurer's table and declared: I have fulfilled the conditions, here, I have bought a house. And not just a roof over our head, but an estate in the genuine "East," where seraphim and cherubim hover around the Throne of Honor, in the Land that is the navel of the world.

Sender implored, if he truly loved his daughter Rayzel, don't take her to the ends of the earth, to that wasteland, and his spouse added her pleas. They were willing to bow to the sentence of marriage, if only Zelig-Haim would go west. With a good sum of his money, Sender would buy them a ticket to Hamburg and from there they would board a ship bound for New York. There are real letters from there and not this nonsense about an English lord, whose name nobody can remember, and they tell a lot about the wonders of America. That is really the promised continent.

Like upside-down roses her memories bobbed. She was almost seventy-five years old then, and yet she caught up with every other woman. Despite her kerchief and the burden of her clothes, she'd easily reach the breakwater. I don't know if she ever competed with a man, maybe only with my grandfather. Even the lifeguard knew her by name, and when we came to the beach that day, he honored her, saying Mrs. Gutman, I hope that someday your granddaughter will swim like you.

I almost burst into tears. I rebelled. Why did I have to do this superfluous beating of my arms and legs? I'll never be a ship captain or a fish, and I already started taking off my shirt.

The marriage ceremony was hastily arranged and Zelig-Haim hurried on his way, and maybe he was afraid that Sender the Treasurer was liable to change his mind just before the glass was broken. Business stopped on the wedding day and Rayzel's girlfriends in their Sabbath dresses hurried to the "bride's dance." Despite Zelig-Haim's slight protest, Sender insisted on bringing a troupe of musicians from the neighboring village in a special wagon, and the local jester was also present, entertaining the guests with his best rhymes. On the wooden platform sat Rayzel on a throne padded with rugs and in her hand was a bouquet of plum flowers picked the day before on the same river where she had met Zelig-Haim years before. First the girls danced in couples and then in circles and the bride was taken down from the heights of the throne to join her friends in a last dance before she became a married woman. From the wedding canopy, they were taken to the "private room" and there, for the first time since their childhood, they exchanged words instead of looks. She was taller than he, which made Itzele and the idlers click their tongue, and yet she felt smaller, and Rayzl vowed to take the sheaf of plum flowers back to its stream of the River Tisa, a sign to those who came after them who would want a share of the Jewish home promised by the English lord. Even though Zelig-Haim was the only one who responded to the mirage of the Zionist *kushan,* the land permit of the Ottoman Empire, she had no doubt that someday others would also join them. As soon as they came to their estate, she would send a letter from the Land of Israel and tell its praises, and she was certain that Sender would not be able to dismiss her letters as a bundle of nonsense.

After the "Seven Blessings," the bride was seated next to the groom and the "*mitzvah* dance" began. Every guest held the end of a silk handkerchief that Rayzl grasped and circled her twice. Even the Zionist danced with her, to Sender's deep sorrow, and the cloth handkerchief waving over his head looked like the wings of a goose led to slaughter. As he danced, the agent called to Zelig-Haim, I've given you the finest property in all Tel Aviv. Guard it like the apple of your eye. And his heart warmed by brandy, he prophesied that

someday Zelig-Haim Gutman himself would serve as Treasurer in the first Hebrew city.

The last of the dancers was the father of the bride, the only one who was allowed to hold her hands and not the handkerchief. Sender danced and couldn't restrain his tears and that sight made Rayzl very sad. The jester declared "Zelig-Goodman a good man and Rayzl a little rose, are going out to redeem their ancient land," and soon the whole family gathered around them in circles, the only time a man could take a woman's hand and a lad take a maiden's hand.

Her mother secretly slipped into her hand *The Book of the Angel Raziel,* which was forbidden to look at because it was dangerous, but it would protect her daughter from pogroms, and when they left the village, the idlers took leave of them, still savoring the slices of cake, and Itzele gave Zelig-Haim a special gift—a tall hat he pulled off of one of the musicians—like a real English lord's.

Good thing you're leaving here, spat Gregor, two less "Zhids" to take care of, and the prostitute Mariana covered her head with a handkerchief and blessed them, for Zelig-Haim had never found fault with her when he passed by her window on his way to say *kaddish* over his parents' graves.

She filled her lungs with the fresh smell of salt. "Zelig-Haim," she cried, "You bought me the sea!"

I'm scared of drowning. Pure and simple. It takes a whole lot of nerve to try to overcome that terror—even for a little while.

My grandmother said, Don't worry. "Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together into one place," the Creator set a limit for the waters, they can't ever go beyond it.

In the summer they arrived. Their ship anchored near Jaffa, in spitting distance of the reef. Their goods and chattels they deposited with the owner of the boat who rowed them ashore in exchange for an exorbitant price, and Rayzl took great pains to make sure her dowry chest didn't disappear, God forbid, which was collapsing under lace cloths and embroidered quilts. In the first days of the journey, her intestines hummed and she spewed up her soul. Zelig-Haim placed cold towels on her forehead, cheered her by waving the *kushan,* which he didn't let go of even in his sleep. After a week, her body made peace with the shaking and her strength returned. Rayzl went up on deck, filling her lungs with the fresh smell of salt and the cool wind, for her they were like the incense of Havdalah in her father's spice box and regrets flooded her. She thrust off her fear that she would never see him again.

In the narrow, dusty alleys of Jaffa, the two of them crept along to the inn in the wake of the porter, and Rayzl constantly kept an eye out for the pickpockets that clustered around the platform. Zelig-Haim kept asking, Where is Tel Aviv? Since he was so eager to glance at his estate, they went out that evening, staring wide-eyed at the darkness, and striving to make out the towers that touch the skies and the flames bursting out of the maw of the crystal fountain. But—as Zelig-Haim comforted Rayzl—it was hard for them to see because it was a foggy night.

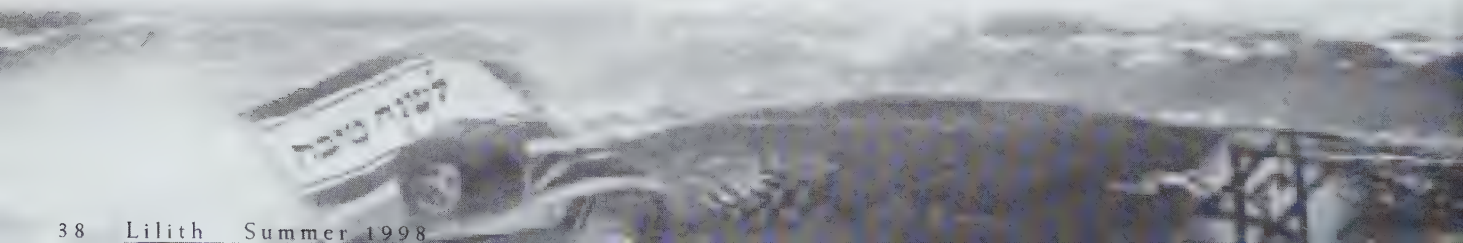
Early in the morning, they hurried to search for the "Eternal Possession" Company, but to their amazement, no one knew the name. The innkeeper took pity on them and led them to the official department of estates, and Zelig-Haim found himself pounding on the desk, an aggressive act he had never done in his life, not even during his years in captivity in Siberia, and demanding that the clerk show him, as it said in the document in his hand, where exactly his estate of thirty square dunams was located.

In the shade of the plum trees, she learned to swim. In one of the streams of the River Tisa. Always in her clothes. One day, somewhere in her childhood, she wanted to know where the stream poured out and discovered that its waters were delivered with great love to the sea at the end of the world.

Where is that place? I asked. Never in my life have I heard of the province of Marmuresh in the Carpathian Mountains. To tell the truth, I doubted her sanity.

A dark cloud of sadness hovers over my grandmother Rayzl's face. Very far away, she whispers, as if she's telling a legend she made up on the spot. For years I refused to believe that such a remote place really did exist.

The cart left Jaffa. In just a little while, they would find peace and be settled down comfortably. A tram they didn't find, and even though she didn't need encouragement, Zelig-Haim tried to bolster Rayzl's spirit. From the winding alleys, the driver turned north, crossed the railroad tracks toward a small suburb of gardens with tiny white houses and straight, clean streets, and soon, carpets of sand stretched before them. The dust rose in front of them and Zelig-Haim impatiently went on asking questions.



Where is the metropolis he was promised? Where is Tel Aviv? The driver calmly blurted out, We just passed it.

It can't be, Rayzl dismissed it. The driver is an ignoramus, a fool who doesn't know the valuables beneath his horses' hooves, and the driver sighed. Once again, for three and a half piasters, he takes a couple of eccentrics to nowhere. Such sleepwalkers are an everyday sight, they gaze at the sands and an expression of confusion spreads over their faces. The man he pitied, for globules of sweat were dripping on his sidelocks, while the woman wasn't perturbed at all by the molten sky.

The driver stopped and took the *kushan* from Zelig-Haim's hand. He was amused, just like the jester at their wedding. Here, mister property owner, a real effendi you are!

Here? whispered Zelig-Haim Gutman, kicking the sand and drawing border lines. And he was already trying to console himself. Even in the sand you can build a house. He'll dig a well like Our Father Abraham, and he'll grow a splendid garden here. Thirty dunams of plum orchards.

The driver refrained from laughing, with a wave of his arm he turned the couple aside toward the blue.

Rayzl filled her lungs with the fresh smell of salt. Zelig-Haim, she cried, you bought me the sea!

Of her whole family, Rayzl was the only one who remained alive. Sender the Treasurer and all the members of his household, and Uncle Samuel and all the other residents of the little village in the district of Marmuresh were taken to the synagogue, where Sender had served as Treasurer for thirty years, and from there they were loaded onto cattle cars.

Once she explained to me that the name Haim, given to my grandfather when he had diphtheria at the age of six, had preserved them from pogroms, and she always believed that *The Book of the Angel Raziel* that her mother put in her hands, and which she never looked at, did indeed fill its function and defended her house against destruction.

Zelig-Haim was dumbstruck. As if Gregor the Gentile had thrown another stone at him. He was sure that Rayzl would turn around and go back. That she would gallop the wagon straight to the port of Jaffa and hurry back to her parents' house. And the driver's shout, Who's the swindler who sold you this nonsense?—just added more torment to his grief. He resolved to throw himself into the water and drown his disgrace. He rushed toward the waves and as he dived, Rayzl's arms wound around his neck and they went in together. He in his *kippah* and caftan and she in her kerchief and long dress. And they wound around one another, laughing and crying, with the salty seawater pouring on their eyes and lips.

Years have passed since the day she tried to teach me how to swim at the religious women's beach. Once I bathed naked with a man and was amazed at what my grandmother had missed, and afterward I changed my mind. Maybe she was right, and it is when clothes cover every part of the flesh that passion blooms fully.

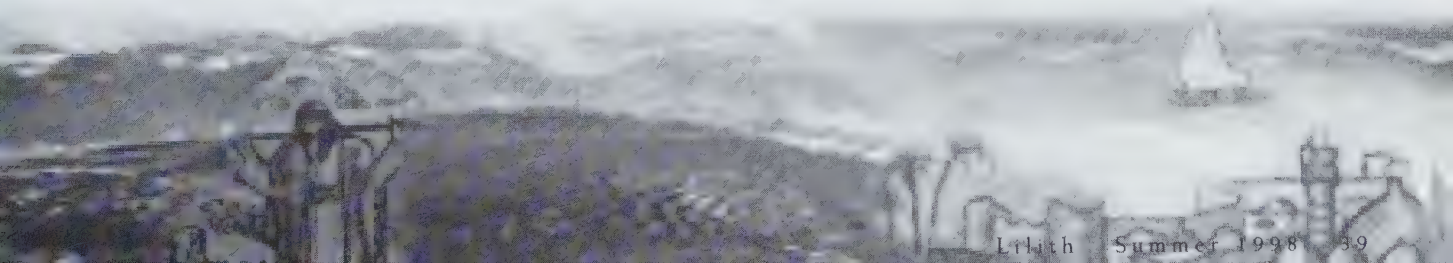
Rayzl was a romantic, but by no means a fool. She didn't exchange green seaweed for a plum branch. I doubt that the River Tisa connects with the Mediterranean Sea. When I swim, I feel a sense of ownership. After all, my grandfather paid all the gold buttons on his uniform for it. The *kushan* I found among her things after her death, all crushed, on one of the embroidered quilts.

In the end, we dived. The promise she gave isn't to be taken lightly, for it was made with great love. At long last, I dared to look; walls of water, rooms of foam, a polished floor, a ceiling of wind roiling breakers. Trees of rock and slopes of coral protected from the tempest, and between them stretch streams that connect to the hidden river. Their lives and deaths depend on each other. A secret yearning rustles in the limpid depths. I remember that for a brief moment, the kerchief slipped off her head and she was naked. I swallowed water, I choked, I almost drowned. Her hair was gold and she looked like a young girl.

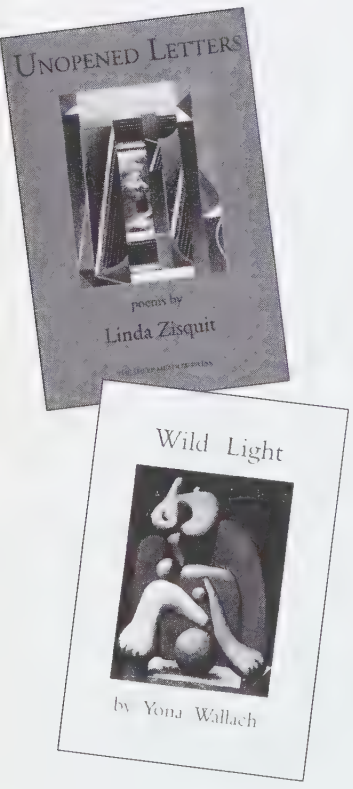
The paralyzing dread has vanished. The face of the sea is turbid now, and rubbish bobs in it, but today of all days I swim a lot. Impossible to live in this place without knowing something from the Torah, even though I'm not a champion like her, and it's been years since I've bathed at the religious women's beach. I keep my eyes open to the wonder underneath and see her—little Rose in the big Mediterranean. ■

Israeli writer Nava Semel, whose books focus on the impact of the Holocaust on Israeli society, has received the National Book Award and the Prime Minister's Award for Literature. Her novel Flying Lessons *was published in the United States by Simon & Schuster; her latest novel,* Bride on Paper, *was published recently in Israel.*

Barbara Harshav has translated several works of poetry and prose from Hebrew, French, Yiddish and German. She recently published a translation from the German of After the Holocaust *by Michael Brenner (Princeton University Press). Her translation of Michal Govrin's Hebrew novel,* The Name, *will appear in the fall (Riverhead Press). She lives in Connecticut and Tel Aviv.*



Silence & Speech; Sacralism & Sexuality



Unopened Letters

Poems by Linda Zisquit
The Sheep Meadow Press, $12.95

Wild Light

by Yona Wallach, translated by Linda Zisquit
The Sheep Meadow Press, $12.95

Every spring the American-born poet Linda Zisquit teaches journal writing out of her home in the German Colony section of Jerusalem. Often she begins her classes with an anecdote relating to her own integration into Israeli society. As a new immigrant nearly two decades ago, Zisquit's Hebrew was limited at best, and she was not inspired to become fluent. Her hesitation continued until she went through childbirth—without language—in a Jerusalem hospital. This experienced muteness drove her to learn and live in Hebrew.

In *Unopened Letters,* Zisquit's second book of poetry, she continues to explore her silences and her borderless/bordered experience as a writer of English in a Hebrew-speaking world. Caught between countries, identities, and opportunities, she feels "halved": "a woman/without borders belongs to anyone./I see myself in this brutal light:/halved, hugging yellow margins,/whoring after man and gods" (from "Unopened Letters").

In "Amnon," Zisquit modernizes the biblical rape of Tamar, setting the tone with a quote from singer Phil Ochs: "I've had her, she's nothing." The juxtaposition of folk song and biblical story speaks to Zisquit's split existence: she is physically in Israel but she is spiritually caught between Israel and America, between Judaism and her secular life, between antiquity and modernity.

Overcoming her early problems with Hebrew, Zisquit began translating the elusive poetry of Yona Wallach in the early 1980s. Her new translation of these poems is entitled *Wild Light: Selected Poems of Yona Wallach.*

Wallach was an Israeli poet unlike any the country had yet experienced. She began publishing in the mid-1960s and died of breast cancer, at age 41, in 1985. In Zisquit's long and loving translator's note, we learn that Wallach's is the voice of an Israel stripped bare of mythology—one in which the biblical tongue has turned to slang "as though the Hebrew purified by [poets Natan] Zach and [Yehuda] Amichai had to be dirtied and given wider range in order to reflect a society in conflict."

The Hebrew Wallach wields is irreverent: meanings are twisted and traditions flaunted. Zisquit claims that Wallach is "credited with taking the feminist revolution in Hebrew poetry upon herself." Her poetry is clearly a revolution—sexualized and explicit:

> "English has all the possibilities for gender
> every I—in effect
> is every possibility of sex
> and every you (feminine) is you
> (masculine)
> and every I is sexless
> and there is no difference between you
> (feminine) and you (masculine) . . .
>
> Hebrew is a sex maniac
> she wants to know who's speaking
> almost a vision, almost an image
> what's forbidden in the whole Torah
> at least to see the sex
> Hebrew peeks through the keyhole
> like me at your mother and you . . ."
>
> —"Hebrew"

Taking on the gender difference in Hebrew, Wallach criticizes and loves her native language in the same poem.

Sexuality is twisted inside out throughout Wallach's poetry, at once suggesting illicit relationships, the sexualization of God ("When you come to sleep with me, come like my father"), and thwarted gender roles. Wallach refers to herself as both woman and man.

Zisquit's translation faithfully preserves the irreverence of Wallach's poetry, including in this compilation "Tefillin," which caused an uproar among Israelis:

> . . . you put tefillin on me too
> bind them on my hands
> play them on me
> move them with delight on my body
> rub them hard against me everywhere
> stimulate me everywhere
> make me swoon with sensation . . .

Zisquit reports that the Orthodox poet Zelda was so enraged by "Tefillin" that she "refused to ever be published again in the same journal as Wallach, and was heard to say 'I wish I had died before seeing that poem.'" The translation retains all the intensity of the original, yet so much is *Wild Light* a linguistic acrostic that the absence of the original language is sorely felt—if only for the opportunity to compare the translation to the original.

—Sarah Wildman

The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls

by Joan Jacobs Brumberg
Random House, $25

The Spice Girls may have a scholarly ally in their call for a new "Girl Power." In her new book, *The Body Project,* Cornell University historian Joan Jacobs Brumberg creatively explores how "the experience of living in an adolescent body is always shaped by the historical moment." She documents that contemporary "body angst" has resulted from girls maturing physically at an earlier age over the past century, with less support from older women and more pressures from popular culture. The author of *Fasting Girls: The History of Anorexia Nervosa* muses that the adolescent obsession of "the body becoming the central paradigm for the self" began when marriage became a matter of selecting a romantic partner rather than being arranged by parents.

Brumberg has fascinating, interdisciplinary chapters on the history of attitudes and commercial, medical, and familial responses to menstruation, acne, weight control, gynecological exams, and the hymen. ("Just like menstrual rags and corsets, this once hallowed membrane has been consigned to the junk heap of women's history.") The book uniquely documents, with family photos and historical advertisements from magazines, how business has relentlessly manipulated adolescent concerns, particularly by developing sanitary and skin-care products marketed directly to teens.

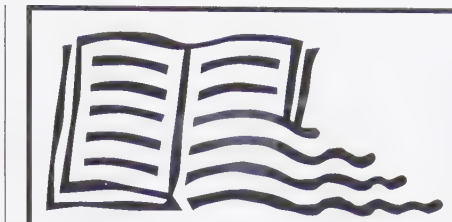
Focusing on middle-class, primarily white, teen girls from the Victorian era to the present, Brumberg relates her own experiences and quotes extensively from diaries, including a few immigrants' memoirs. Though her references to sexy rock 'n' roll lyrics are dated, Brumberg frequently credits her teaching experiences for revelatory contemporary perspectives, such as on body piercing ("'You don't see JAPS [Jewish American Princesses] going around wearing nose rings,' a 16 year old with jewels in her face proclaimed with demonstrable pride."), and quotes generously from her students' research and recent unpublished dissertations.

Brumberg gives short shrift to the role of the fashion industry in the 20th century, from the flat-chested flapper look in the 1920's to 1950's full-figured lingerie like the "training bra," though she does see a collusion of doctors with "the nation's entrepreneurs [to] accommodate, and also encourage, precocious sexuality." Brumberg is very insightful in showing how the recent popularity of casual dress such as jeans and thong bikinis has led to ever more "body projects" for girls, with the new emphasis on the taut pelvis, sculptured behind, and the fear of having "thunder thighs." She is saddened at how Title IX, which revolutionized athletic opportunities for girls in schools, has had the ancillary effect of leading to additional sleek and muscular body projects, even if based more on healthy food consumption and exercise. While Brumberg points out how closely sex education is linked to body education, her sympathetic half chapter on contemporary African-American teens and pregnancy is based more on personal and journalistic impressions than the historical context that so informs the rest of the book.

Brumberg sums up the challenges gleaned from a look over the past century: "Girls who do not feel good about themselves need the affirmation of others, and that need, unfortunately, almost always empowers male desire. Girls who hate their bodies do not make good decisions about partners or the kind of sexual activity. . . . They are susceptible to manipulation, to flattery, even to abuse." A recent nationwide poll of 13-17 year olds quantified Brumberg's historical analysis: only 39% of girls felt very positive about themselves, compared to 54% of boys, and 38% most frequently cited "my looks" or "my body" as the one thing they would most like to change about themselves, significantly higher than a similar survey four years ago, reported in The New York Times.

Brumberg issues a ringing call for all women to re-take collective responsibility for girls, and to help create "a new sexual ethic in a postvirginal world. . . a coherent philosophy about what is fair and equitable in the realm of the intimate. . . [and about what is] pleasurable and responsible [in order] to resist social and commercial pressures." Too bad such a philosophy does not come wrapped inside each "Spice World" video that pre-teens are buying.

—Nora Lee Mandel



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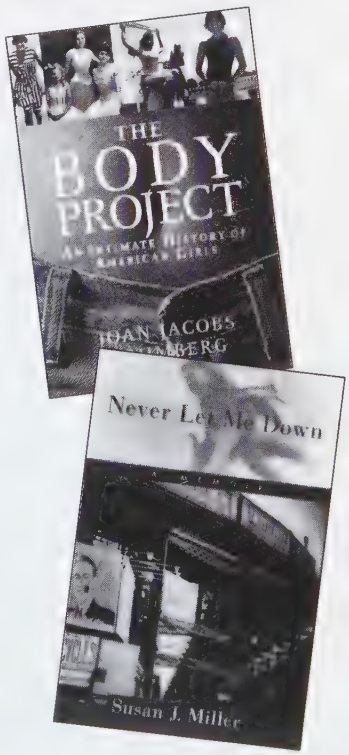
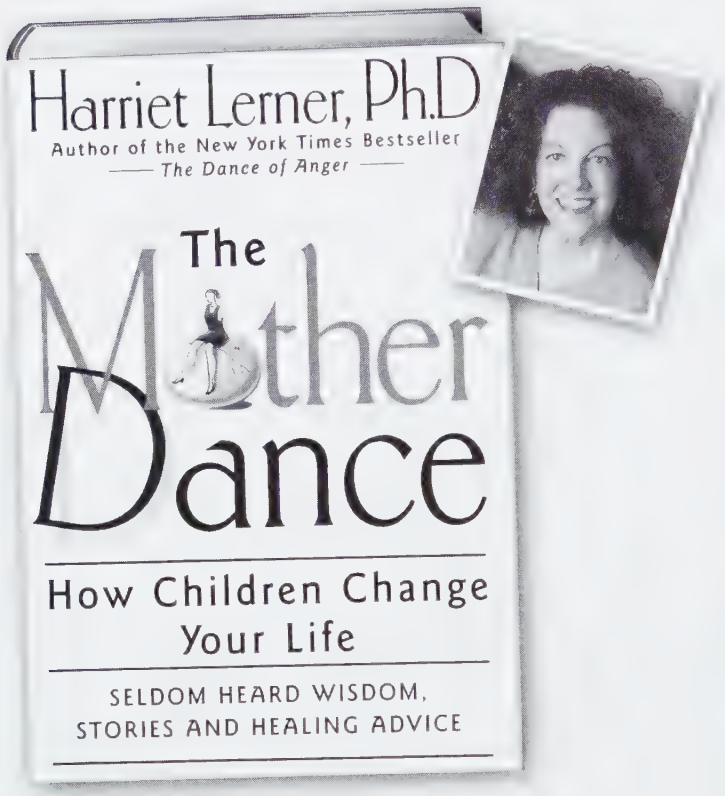


Never Let Me Down: A Memoir

by Susan J. Miller
Henry Holt and Company, $22.50

When Susan J. Miller's mother spoke at a conference of the National Organization for Women, she described her own late-in-life embrace of feminism and portrayed her Jewish family as typical

Raves for Harriet Lerner's new book: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middle class, with a hard-working, bread-winning father and stay-at-home mother. What she didn't say, to her daughter's dismay, was the truth: her husband had been an addict, she had been chronically depressed, and her two children had borne the brunt of the dislocation and fear.

The truth is what Miller sets out to reclaim and reveal in *Never Let Me Down*. When she learned, at age 21, that her father had been a junkie during most of her childhood, her memories and perceptions of self shattered. In this winding, circular narrative where streams of memory flow into and out of each other, she uses words to ensnare and hold the fragments of her life.

Sidney Miller ran with the 1950s New York City jazz crowd, feeding on its music as well as its heroin. He used words as pile drivers, pummeling his daughter with ideas and arguments while never actually seeing her. Miller recalls feeling so invisible to him as a child that she feared he would not recognize her out of context.

His blindness extended to the ritual abuse she suffered throughout childhood at the hands of her brother. Aaron, not so skilled with language, fit poorly into an intellectual Jewish family; his frustration played itself out on the body of his younger sister. Miller's mother saw this abuse but felt powerless. She blamed herself for Aaron's anger because, for a few months when he was a baby, on doctor's advice, she didn't feed him every time he cried. Miller tells this story of misplaced guilt and subsequent neglect twice.

Even as a frightened young girl, Miller was forced to talk her mother out of the murky clutches of her despair. Acknowledgment of her own pain—and the right to it—came only later.

Miller's search for understanding extends beyond her own life into the lives of her parents, in which lurk her father's bitter mother, "the wicked witch of Brighton Beach," and her mother's own abusive brother, fanatical Uncle Willy "with the Hitlerian mustache." Willy banished all the children to the dank, empty basement after his seder every Passover. Each year they returned because Willy was the only relative with a dining room.

Never Let Me Down posits that the way out of the deep pit of the past is to summon the demons that play there and expose them to the light. Miller is fearless in this regard, sharing even the darkest secrets, like her brief sexual liaison with her brother. In the process of reconstructing her own life, she draws a skillful and passionate portrait of a disintegrating family.

—Tamara Fishman

The Secret Book of Dona Grazia

by Jacqueline Park
Simon & Schuster, $25

The eponymous hero of this detailed, absorbing Italian Renaissance novel fights her grandmother to learn Jewish texts alongside her brother (and is beaten for it), enters the Casa de Conversos and almost renounces Judaism for Christianity, becomes the model for a Mantegna painting, gives birth in the Venice ghetto, witnesses Savonarola's burning in Florence and the sack of Rome by the new Protestant anti-papists, survives attacks by anti-Jewish bigots and brigands and has a lifelong passionate love bond with a blue-eyed Catholic nobleman.

And yet this book is no soap opera, nor merely a catalogue of historical events. It's an impressive reconstruction of a life, suggested to the author's imagination by her discovery of two actual letters—one from an educated young Italian Jewish woman who becomes Grazia in the novel; the other from the Italian Catholic noblewoman who presses her to convert, and later to become her personal secretary.

Around these letters Park weaves a tale that's personal, political and historical. This is a first novel from Park, founding chair of NYU's Dramatic Writing Program, and its numerous dust-jacket blurbs stress the book's historical accuracy. But more than that—Park gives us in Grazia a woman whose genuinely dramatic life is not melodramatic but utterly engaging: her family of *banchieri* (like Jews in almost all of Europe, the fictional dei Rossis, and the real-life Finzis who appear here, were forbidden to enter most trades other than "usury"), her best friend who dies in childbirth, her descriptions of Mantova, Bologna, Venice, her opinions on humanism, on Dante, on Maimonides all come to us here in Grazia's own words, since the "Secret Book" of the title is the epistolary memoir she writes to her son.

Read this book! It is a passport to Renaissance Italy with a Jewish feminist guide.

—Susan Weidman Schneider

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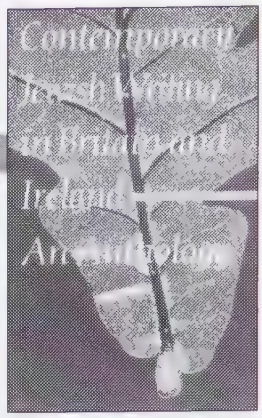

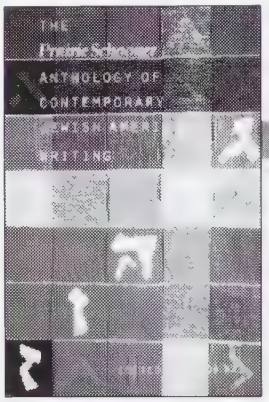

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In order to promote the growth of fiction and non-fictional writings on Jewish cultural issues, the Dora Teitelboim Foundation is searching for writers (amateur or professional) to showcase their original *previously unpublished* short stories in the Jewish media.

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To receive contest rules and an application form, eligible entrants should send a **stamped, self-addressed envelope** to: The Dora Teitelboim Foundation Writing Contest, P.O. Box 14-0820, Coral Gables, FL 33114

Persian Brides

by Dorit Rabinyan
George Braziller, Inc., $22.50

Flora is a cursed woman. At 15, the once-beautiful girl already has been married to a dishonest, itinerant cloth-salesman who "left her a baby in her belly and lice in her hair." The gossip in her Persian village holds that she suffers because she lost her virginity and became pregnant on a "cursed night of a lunar eclipse, when even hens lay rotten blood-red eggs."

Her mother, a woman overwhelmed by the intricate superstitions of her Iranian Jewish culture, advises her to pee on a hen's egg that has been laid at dawn, "then break the pissed-on egg under a blossoming tree" in order to make her wayward husband return. The women of the village tell her to yawn frequently to place a curse on his head.

In this first novel, set in a Jewish village in turn-of-the-century Iran, 25-year-old Israeli writer Dorit Rabinyan follows the romantic dreams of pampered, self-indulgent Flora and her correspondingly self-effacing orphaned cousin Nazie. Waiting impatiently for her own child-bearing years to begin, 11-year-old Nazie watches as her cousin's overflowing sexuality—which once infected the neighborhood with jealousy, desire and anger—becomes the source of her own undoing.

Rabinyan apparently draws on the rich folklore of her own Persian background to turn the standard plot of a woman spurned into a unique novel that walks the line between sinister fairy tale and stark reality. The writer's biggest tool in this balancing act is intensely physical imagery.

"Shahin," Rabinyan writes about Flora's missing husband, "did not come back to see Flora's legs thickening, the veins in her thighs swelling, and the purple blood vessels writhing like snakes and busting like bubbles on her calves. Her eyelids also swelled and grew heavy from crying. She gouged mourning scratches in her cheeks, and her hair fell out in clumps."

This passage is typical of Rabinyan's wonderfully saturated prose. When you put the book down, however, you also may feel the need to clean the chick pea grime out of your fingernails and the bugs out of your kitchen.

—Sarah Blustain

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Tzedaka

Kol Ha-Isha (The Women's Voice) is a feminist center founded in Jerusalem in 1994 as a resource and referral center for women's immediate and long-term social, legal and emotional needs. It has a special focus on meeting the self-defined needs of Mizrahi women, single mothers, Palestinian women, women considering motherhood, survivors of domestic violence, low-income women and lesbian/ bisexual women. It also houses Antea A Women's Activist Art Gallery. For a $50 contribution to Kol Ha-Isha on the Move—a campaign to raise funds to relocate to more accessible space—you will receive Jerusalem Women's Voices, a quarterly English language update on women's activism in Jerusalem. *Kol Ha-Isha Women's Center, 38 Ben Yehuda St., P.O. Box 37157, Jerusalem 91371 Israel; 972-2-6222591, fax 972-2-6256187; kolisha@netmedia; tax-deductible contributions may be sent to US-Israel Women to Women, 275 Seventh Ave., 8th Fl., New York, NY 10001; (212)206-7031; USIsrW2W@aol.com*

Bella Abzug, 1920-1998 "A galactic force for women, peace and justice" according to Blanche Weisen Cook, is being memorialized with contributions to the Women's Environment and Development Organization, an international advocacy network that Abzug co-founded in 1990. Tax-deductible contributions may be sent to *Bella S. Abzug Memorial Fund, WEDO, 355 Lexington Ave., 3rd floor, New York, NY 10017.*

Which of us does not have a box of old buttons too nice to toss? Send buttons to be made into attractive broaches—lending dignity and financial security to women at a shelter. Send buttons and or order pins for $15-$30, or get wholesale prices for your organization to resell. *Women's Craft Cooperative at Rosie's Place, 889 Harrison Ave., Boston, MA 02118; (617)442-9322 x262.*

Body & Soul

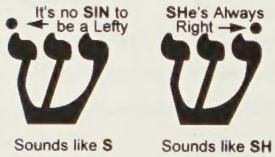
Becky Bell was a high school junior in 1988 when she became pregnant. She tried to get an abortion at a women's health clinic but learned that under Indiana law, she first had to obtain the consent of one parent. Afraid to disappoint her parents, Becky had an illegal abortion and died from complications one week later. In *Choices*, her mother tells her story.

Choices: Women Speak Out About Abortion has been published by the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Actions League Foundation in honor of the 25th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*. The 56-page book tells 12 women's thoughtful and sometimes tragic stories about their abortions. $14.95 published by Seal Press and available in bookstores. More information from *The NARAL Foundation, 1156 15th St., NW, Washington, DC 20005; (202) 973-3000; naral@naral.org*

Older women are at greater risk for depression than men or younger women, it turns out, yet often the condition goes unnoticed or untreated. Signs of depression in older women can be masked by bereavement or chronic health problems, or may be wrongly dismissed as an inevitable part of aging. "Identifying and Coping with Depression" is the theme of the January 1998 issue of Women & Aging Letter. Subscriptions are $5 for 6 issues or $9 for 12 issues, payable to *Brandeis University Women & Aging Letter, National Policy and Resource Center on Women and Aging, Heller School MS 035, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA 02254-9110; (800)929-1995.*

Read Hebrew?

A Free Hebrew Reading Crash Course teaches Jews with little or no background in Hebrew the alphabet and reading skills in only five hour-and-a-half weekly sessions. You can request a free sample excerpt booklet from the text *Reishith Binah*, by Meshulam Fisch. Find a location near you for this and other programs such as in basic Judaism courses and



Turn Friday Night Into Shabbat/Shabbat Across America. *National Jewish Outreach Program, 485 Fifth Ave. #701, New York, NY 10017; (800)44-HEBRE(W) or (212)986-7450 or info@njop.org; www.njop.org*

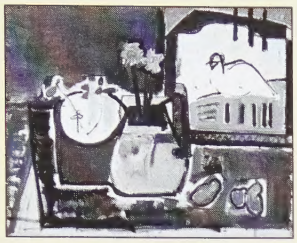
Noga, the Israeli independent feminist magazine, has as the theme of its newest issue (#33) the 50th anniversary of Israel from the perspective of 29 women who live in different parts of Israel, come from various backgrounds and belong to different religious and societal groups. "Lately Israel is overwhelmed with dozens of expensive albums, all of which tell one story—the white Ashkenazi male story only. This fact makes our special issue all the more important as it gives a voice to the hidden and silenced life of women in Israel," says Rachel Ostrowitz, Noga's editor. Subscription in Israel are 95 NIS for four issues; outside Israel $38 for airmail or $30 surface mail. *Noga, P.O. Box 21376, 61213 Tel Aviv ISRAEL, (972)3-5227663; fax 972-3-5237787*

It's Academic

A European Conference on Gender Equality in Higher Education will take place August 30-September 1 in Helsinki. Conducted in English, this will be an opportunity for those dealing with gender equality and personnel matters in universities and educational administration to share information and create new strategies. Topics include the low proportion of women in top positions, open and hidden gender discrimination, occupational segregation according to gender and sexual harassment. A specific goal is the creation of a European network on gender equality in higher education. *Contact: Teija Mankkinen, PB 33 (Yliopistonkatu 4) Fin-00014 University of Helsinki; 358-9-191 2 2541; fax 358-9-191 2 3993; teija.mankkinen@helsinki.fi*

Travel to Be There

Jewish Women—as preservers of tradition, as revolutionaries, as cultural mediators, as strugglers against persecution, military warriors and on the spiritual frontiers—will be the subject of presentations by scholars Hasia Diner, Marion Kaplan and others, the week of July 26-31. This institute, which will also feature the artistry of Adrienne Cooper and Joan Roth, is part of a summer-long program of cultural events at Circle Lodge in Dutchess County, New York. Contact *The Workmen's Circle, 45 E. 33rd St., New York, NY 10016; (212)889-6800 x203, outside New York call (800)922-2558.*



***Still Life & Dove* by Leah Nikel**

Fifty Israeli objects of art appear in "50/50: Israeli Art from Bay Area Collections." See paintings, photographs and a film projection installation in an exhibit that features the work of Pamela Levy, Leah Nikel, Michal Rovner and other artists. On view May 10-July 26 at the *Jewish Museum—San Francisco, 121 Steuart St., San Francisco, CA 94105; (415)543-8880; fax (415)543-4180.*

A Four Nation Desert Tour—18 days on jeep, camel and foot—comprises Egypt (the Sinai), Palestinian Authority (Judean), Israel (Negev and Judean), and Jordan (Edomite) deserts and is a happy instance of international cooperation. This is a pioneering first for the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, which was founded in 1953 and is the Middle East's largest non-governmental body working for the preservation of the environment. Request their guide "Israel Nature Trails" from *SPNI, 89 Fifth Ave. #800, New York, NY 10003; (800)323-0035; (212)645-8732; fax (212)645-8749; or SPNI, 3 Hashfela St., 66183 Tel Aviv, Israel; (972)3-6388677; fax (972)3-6883940.*

Jewish Child Survivors of the Holocaust will gather for their next annual conference October 16-19 at the Double Tree Hotel in Rockville, Maryland. Reservations should be made by September 1. You can also find out about local groups across the US and nine other countries that have joined the new Federation of Jewish Child Survivors of the Holocaust by contacting the *Hidden Child Foundation/ADL, 823 UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017; (212)885-7900; fax (212)867-0779.*

Correction:
You can e-mail submissions to Living Text: The Journal of Contemporary Midrash to *jihammer@jtsa.edu*

The Association of Institutions for Feminist Education and Research in Europe has a homepage and is eager to create links with women's studies researchers, organizations and institutions. Visit: http: wwworg.uio.no/www-other/nikk/AOIFE/homedaa.htm or contact *Diana Aaberg Anders, NIKK, Nordic Institute for Women's Studies and Gender Research, University of Oslo, P.O. Box 1156, Blindern, 0317 Oslo, Norway; 47 22 85 88 71; fax 47 22 85 89 50; d.a.anders@ nikk.uio.no*

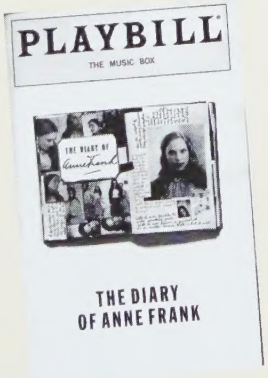
Bible Heroes

Can the stories of Genesis and Exodus have women in the foreground? Educator Marsha Pravder Mirkin (with funding from the Shefa Fund) has created a Torah study curriculum for grades 2-4 in which women as well as men are main characters. It includes seven lesson plans with connected stories, review and homework question and recommended readings. It can be ordered for $20, plus $10 for a supplemental teacher's guide from: *Temple Beth Elohim, 10 Bethel Rd., Wellesley, MA 02181; Attn: Rabbi Jeffrey B. Lazar.*

Biblical Men in the Midrash will be published as a companion volume to *Biblical Women in the Midrash* (Jason Aronson, 1997). Here is an opportunity to take on traditional views of what it means to be a Jewish man and offer some new models. Send your contemporary *midrashim* to be included alongside biblical and rabbinic material in this anthology. Contributions from both women and men may be sent to the editors: *Naomi Mara Hyman, 228 Queen Anne Rd., Stevensville, MD 21666; (410)643-1914; naomi@skipjack.bluecrab.org; or Larry Gerstenhaber at larrymg@aol.com*

Personalizing Our History

The Diary of Anne Frank is now playing on Broadway. Two resources can help you prepare kids before taking them to see this troubling



drama. "The Reader's Companion to the Diary of A Young Girl" is $5 from the *Anne Frank Center USA, 584 Broadway, #408, New York, NY 10012; (212)431-7993;* and "The Holocaust Through the Eyes of Children," a 12-lesson curriculum for sixth and seventh graders, is $12, from the *Board of Jewish Education , 426 W. 58th St., New York, NY 10019 (212)245-8200.*

A Genealogical Poster! Now you can observe family patterns. Barbara Schwartz-Shahmoon has created a poster with blanks to fill in (and instructions) where you can insert up to four generations of names, dates, places and times of Jewish life-cycle events in your family with Torah readings for various dates included. Research your past, or start a tree for the next generation to continue. Send $15 to *Sarah Blustain, 350 W. 55th St., #8G, New York, NY 10019.*

—compiled by Naomi Danis

the ways we are

FUNNY, YOU DON'T LOOK BUDDHIST

ON BEING A FAITHFUL JEW AND A PASSIONATE BUDDHIST

BY SYLVIA BOORSTEIN

I have a growing collection of Siddurim (prayer books) because I love lingering over the poetry and the imagery, the differences in tone and style that characterize different religious perspectives. And part of my pleasure in belonging to a congregation that prays together is that we always say the same words, aloud and in rhythm with one another. It is as regular and predictable as attending, calmly, to one breath after the next. Group prayer adds reassuring stability to my schedule. And it's also true that sometimes, in the middle of saying so many words, I long for more communal silent spaces.

I've imagined what it might be like to have silent services shaped by liturgical consciousness, perhaps informed by single words that orchestrate the consciousness work of liturgy with minimal sound. I was teaching at a retreat with my friend Shefa, and I told her my fantasy.

"Maybe just three words," I said. "One word from Genesis—*Hineyni* (Here I am); one from Passover Hagaddah—*Dayeynu* (It is enough for us); and one from Psalms—*Ashrey* (Happy)."

My idea was that people could sit together quietly, cultivating mindful presence. The group consciousness would be individual practice with the support that comes through feeling part of a group. The key word for that awareness of shared intent and commitment would be *Hineynu* (Here we are).

I imagined that *Dayeynu* (It is enough for us) might be the words people could think (or perhaps whisper) to acknowledge the peace of unconfused presence. Then I wondered, "How would I feel if someone whispered *'Dayeynu'* and I didn't feel peaceful? Would that demoralize me or inspire me? Perhaps," I said, "it would sustain me so that I could at least sigh *'Dayeynu.'* If I could sincerely say *'Dayeynu,'* whatever my situation, I would then be able to say *'Ashrey'* . . . in appreciation of the natural contentment of the balanced mind."

Shefa and I mentioned our abbreviated liturgy discussion to the people at the retreat, but since retreats are silent (except for instructions and liturgy), no one commented. The next day the whole group sat for a mindfulness practice period using the technique of focusing attention exclusively on hearing sounds. My experience with this practice is often the direct, intuitive understanding that my sense of personal self exists only in relationship. It is a most immediate way for me to remember that there is no one who is ever alone. My interconnectedness is revealed when I listen.

After the hearing meditation, Shefa said, "I think our liturgy must also contain the word *Sh'ma* (Hear!)."

Rabbi Judith HaLevy, one of the retreatants, exclaimed, "Finally! I've been waiting for two days for you to say that!"

Later we all added another word: "Amen." ■

Sylvia Boorstein is a psychotherapist, a teacher of Buddhism and an observant Jew.

Adapted by Sylvia Boorstein from her new book, *That's Funny, You Don't Look Buddhist: On Being a Faithful Jew and a Passionate Buddhist.* Reprinted by permission of HarperSan Francisco, a division of HarperCollins Publishers.